

Speech by President Danny Faure before the National Assembly, 18th October 2016

Honorable Speaker,

Honorable Leader of Opposition,

Honorable Leader of Government Business,

Honorable Deputy Speaker,

Dear Honorable MNAs,

Dear people of Seychelles,

Mr Speaker,

I would like to first of all congratulate you on your election as Speaker, to lead our National Assembly.

I would also like to congratulate:

- Honorable Ramkalawan on his election as Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly;
- Honorable Decomarmond on his appointment as Leader of Government Business;
- And Honorable Prea on his election as Deputy Speaker.

Congratulations to all the honorable MNAs, who are the representatives of the Seychellois nation.

I am very happy to be here before this institution where I started my political career 23 years ago. I see the honorable MNAs of the time who are present here today. They are Honorable Ramkalawan, Honorable Decomarmond, Honorable William, and Honorable Simon Gill. And you, Honorable Speaker, you were the Minister for Education and Culture then.

Two decades have passed, and each one of us carries the same conviction in what we each believe in. I believe in a fairer society, one that is more united, more fraternal, more prosperous and more human.

In order to attain this type of society, our work has to be guided by certain principles, such as justice, equality of opportunities, social justice, and redistribution of wealth. As for me, these principles will inspire my work as President.

I have chosen to address you today in line with Article 92(1) of our Constitution. I have chosen to come before you to talk about the reorganization in government administration, and to announce certain measures.

Our development programme will continue to put people at the centre of development.

We will accelerate the implementation of our programme, with more vigour and energy. This necessitates a change in the administration structure of our government, and also a change in certain policies, procedures and method of work.

The new stage we are entering is one that is more complex, whereby solutions require the cooperation of several stakeholders. Consequently, in order to ensure that we focus our efforts towards the accomplishments of our objectives, I will stress on three things:

- Good governance;
- Transparency;
- And accountability.

Regulations governing the structures already in place will be reviewed to better reflect good governance, transparency, and accountability.

I will now give details on the new administration structure.

The Office of the President will have portfolio responsibilities for:

- Council of Ministers and Cabinet Office;
- Department of Defence;
- Department of Legal Affairs;
- Department of Public Administration.

The Office of the Vice-President will have portfolio responsibilities for:

- Department of Information;
- Department of the Blue Economy;
- Department of Investment and Industry;
- Department of ICT;
- Department of Risk and Disaster Management until it becomes an autonomous agency;
- The Vice-President's Office will also be responsible for all Religious and Civil Society affairs, and also the Inner Islands and Outlying Islands.

There will be 12 ministries, as follows:

Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, to be made up of two departments:

- Department of Health whose mission is to promote, protect and restore the health and quality of life and dignity of all Seychellois. We will also create conditions for all those concerned to make our health our responsibility.
- Department of Social Affairs whose mission is to collaborate with the stakeholders to empower the communities so that they participate in the determination of their needs; to promote a culture of self-reliance, responsibility, respect, tolerance, for their economic welfare and social cohesion.

Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development will have two departments:

- The Department of Education whose mission is to build a quality system of education and training which reflects national and universal values and promotes the all-round development of a human being and enable them to participate fully in the country's socio-economic development.
- The Department of Human Resource Development whose mission is to formulate human resource development policies and develop a national plan which is in line with the country's development evolution.

Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture will comprise two departments:

- The Department of Youth and Sports whose mission is to enable our youth to participate actively in the realization of their aspirations and in national development; to promote a sport, leisure and recreation culture, for health improvement and the wellbeing of our people.
- The Department of Culture whose mission is to protect and promote the Seychellois Creole heritage to ensure that it permeates all national plans and policies, and drive the development of all its potentials to contribute and add value to the economic pillars of the country.

Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Ports and Marine will have two departments:

- The Department of Tourism has portfolio responsibility for the first pillar of Seychelles' economy. The mission of this department is to safeguard the good image of Seychelles as a unique Creole destination by ensuring that the country's security, as well as environment protection, the culture and quality standards, remain the main the most valuable assets of Seychelles as a competitive destination.
- Civil Aviation, Ports and Marine has as mission the formulation of policies and national programmes to develop and regulate the aviation and maritime sectors in the country.

Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries:

- The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries whose mission is to strengthen the local food production base in order to improve domestic contribution towards food security; optimize the use of natural resources through opportunities to create employment in the agricultural and fishing sectors.

Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate change will have two departments:

- The Department of Environment's mission is to promote, coordinate the management and conservation of a balanced ecology of our natural environment while taking into account the constitutional requirements in line with the national sustainable socio-economic development.
- The Department of Energy and Climate Change whose mission is to develop, implement and coordinate policies which will gradually lead to reduction in Seychelles' conventional energy costs through the promotion of renewable and more efficient energy production.

Ministry of Habitat, Infrastructure and Land Transport will have three departments:

- The mission of the Department of Habitat, which is the custodian of all State lands, is to facilitate national economic development through efficient use of land for housing development, commercial buildings and other social needs.
- The Department of Infrastructure whose mission is to undertake infrastructure building studies, manage the projects in line with government policies, and manage housing construction projects.
- The Department of Land Transport whose mission is to guarantee a sufficient level of land transport capacity that meets the country's socio-economic requirements, while taking into account the need to keep our environment healthy.

Ministry of Internal Affairs has three departments:

- The Department of Immigration and Civil Status whose mission is to issue passports, enforce the immigration and passport control system in the country, establish and administer the requirements for applications for Seychellois citizenship, and register births, marriages and deaths.
- The Department of Prison whose mission is to protect the public against those who have committed criminal offences, put in place the best correctional facilities that are in accordance with human rights respect, and develop appropriate programmes for the rehabilitation of prisoners.
- The Department of Police whose mission is to maintain law and order and keep the peace with goodwill, without fear or favour.

The Ministry of Local Government:

- The Ministry of Local Government whose mission is to empower local communities to have access to good quality of life, give the necessary support to the local and community authorities to enable them to manage community affairs well. They will also be required to engage all partners in community affairs.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' mission is to promote and safeguard the national interests of the Republic of Seychelles through the practice of a proactive diplomacy and respect for the fundamental principles of the United Nations.

Ministry of Finance, Commerce and Economic Planning has two departments:

- The Department of Finance and Commerce whose mission is to manage the country's economy through sound policies and fiscal plans in order to have economic stability and sustainable development.
- The Department of Economic Planning whose mission is to develop economic policies that will accelerate national economic growth.

The Ministry of Employment, Entrepreneurship Development and Business Innovation has two departments:

- The Department of Employment whose mission is to promote productive employment for all workers in a sound, safe and healthy environment and ensure that regulations at work are enforced in collaboration with the social partners.
- The Department of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation whose mission is to actively facilitate assistance for local businesses and identify opportunities for success and development in order to improve the capacity of businesses to become more competitive.

Mr Speaker,

I am reorganizing the structure of government through these ministries, with the objective that we deliver better for our people, that services become more efficient, and that we raise the level of performance throughout all ministries, departments and agencies. That our approach is well coordinated, and that we utilize better our financial and human resources.

Good governance and boards of directors

Mr Speaker,

I will now announce certain measures concerning good governance.

I will review the appointments of the boards of public commercial enterprises and public agencies with the objective of promoting greater transparency and also to give the opportunity to more professionals to serve on the boards. This will come into effect as from January 2017.

There will be a limit on the number of boards a public sector employee can serve on, and the target is not more than two at a time. Board meetings will have to be held outside normal working hours, or on Saturdays, to avoid affecting government services.

However, there will be exceptions to allow board meetings to take place during normal working hours. Planning Authority meetings are an example, because the nature of the authority requires the presence of staff of other ministries and members of the public.

Ministers are responsible for the guidelines and directives on the policies of commercial enterprises and public agencies which fall under their respective portfolios.

On the other hand, chief executives of commercial enterprises and public agencies will report directly to the chairpersons of the boards for the daily operations and are responsible to the boards which are in charge of them.

Amendments to the different laws will be presented to the National Assembly to allow us to put in place a procedure whereby all chairpersons of boards and chief executives of commercial enterprises will present the annual and financial accounts of their respective organizations before the Finance and Public Accounts committee of the National Assembly.

Henceforth, it is not allowed to appoint ministers either as chairpersons of boards or members on the board of public enterprises or public agencies.

Henceforth, a principal secretary will not be appointed a chairperson of the board of a public agency or commercial enterprise which falls under the portfolios of own ministry.

However, a principal secretary can become chairperson of the board of other agencies outside the portfolios of own ministry.

Members of executive committees of political parties

Everybody, including public sector workers, have the right to participate in the country's political life on condition they do it outside working hours and not use their work premises for political campaigning.

Human Resource Management

Mr Speaker,

In this new stage of our development, we will work on new policies with the objective of presenting to the National Assembly next year a new bill on the creation of an independent Public Service Commission.

Among the most important of our resources are our workers whose welfare needs to be well looked after. All public organizations need to put in place a system that will facilitate communication between workers and management, and vice-versa. Management also needs to meet workers in a formal meeting at least twice a year to hear their views, concern and aspirations on the functioning of their workplace.

Discipline

The public service is governed by rules established through laws, regulations, orders and procedures.

These provide for the code of conduct and ethics, which is the minimum standards of conduct and integrity expected of public sector employees. The code of good conduct also outlines the rights and obligations of each individual to respect. The violation of the code of conduct and ethics is a problem of discipline and disciplinary actions may be taken. I will not tolerate victimization in any form.

Employment in the public service necessitates police clearance. This is purely a check against criminal history, and not for any other consideration.

Zero tolerance of corruption

Now that we have an Anti-Corruption Commission which is independent, any case of corruption must be reported for the necessary investigations and appropriate sanctions. Corruption will not be tolerated in the public service.

Health, pest control, disaster and risk management, and maritime security

Mr Speaker,

There is a need to boost certain authorities and give them more resources with the objective of protecting our population. The Public Health Authority's mandate for the surveillance and control of diseases will be strengthened.

Mr Speaker, today we do not have malaria in Seychelles. We do not have zika. But this is not something we should take for granted. We will put more resources at the disposal of this section of the Ministry of Health in order to ensure that we combat any diseases reaching Seychelles in a well-structured manner, in an appropriate time limit, and with the necessary resources.

Secondly, there is the issue of the unit for the protection of animals and plants, which is in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. Recently, there have been two pests in particular which have affected our quality of life. They are the hairy caterpillar and the gnat. Both have impacted negatively on the lives of

all our citizens. We will ensure that the division of bio-security in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries gets more resources and is strengthened to be able to combat pests which arrive in the country.

The third area concerns the way we protect ourselves from disasters and reduce our exposure to risks.

The Department of Risks and Disaster Management will become an agency. We will increase its human and financial capacities to render it more effective in the discharge of its responsibilities, in line with its mandate.

Mr Speaker, there is also the issue of our maritime security. This is not something we can take too lightly.

It is necessary that we are constantly monitoring our ocean. To ensure that there is no illegal fishing taking place in our waters. Also to ensure that our sea does not become the new frontier for illegal activities.

The Coast Guard, Marine Police, and NDEA will intensify their work in this field.

We will present a new bill of law to provide for the transformation of the Seychelles Maritime Safety Administration into an independent authority with the responsibilities to regulate maritime activities. This will allow it to get the manpower and resources necessary to act in a well-structured manner, within an acceptable timeframe, and with the necessary resources.

Consultations

Mr Speaker,

The first task the ministers have to undertake is take their turn to put in place the structures which reflect good governance, transparency and accountability, and whereby we are able to measure performance and high standard of service in an objective way.

Mr Speaker, it is important that any changes in policies and programmes take into account the impact these will have on the lives of our citizens. It is important that any programmes in future are formulated in consultation with the people. This will allow our citizens to be part of the consultative process and give us the opportunity to share this capacity with them.

This is the way to work with people and work for them.

All of us who work with people and for people must have the compassion. People are not merely a name or a number on a file. People have feelings. They have expectations. And the service we give and the work we do have an impact on their daily lives.

Your political opinion or religious belief is not important to me. What matters is that when you are tasked with 10 things to do, do the 10 things and not two, not seven. When a file is on your desk and you have all the authority to take a decision on it, do it in less than 48 hours.

When the matter in the file requires consultations with another officer in another ministry or agency, there is no need to make the person go round in circles. On the contrary, meet together with all those in

authority, take the correct decision and please move this file and inform the member of the public of the outcome within a reasonable time.

Access to information

Mr Speaker,

We also need to manage the expectations of our population. In order to do this, it is important that our population receives information that is correct and timely. This necessitates an improvement in the way we communicate with our population. In line with this, government will, in the next six months, present a comprehensive bill of law on access to information.

Housing

A sector which preoccupies us is housing. At the moment, the price of land and cost of construction are such that the majority of people are not able to buy a plot of land and build a house on it for their families. As a result, they need government assistance.

Mr Speaker, there are today 4,911 people who are participating in the Home Ownership Scheme. This gives an indication of the size of housing demand. Government alone will never be able to satisfy the demand in this sector.

We need a new partnership, a new commitment, a new collective effort to address the demand for housing.

We need to immediately review the provision and allocation of land, the provision of housing financing, and set up new partnership with the private sector with the objective of increasing the stock of houses on Mahe, Praslin and La Digue.

Our principle is that housing assistance is need-based. There will be exceptions whereby government will have to build houses for those who are living in deplorable conditions and have no means at all.

Decentralisation

We will continue to decentralize more of the services and programmes to make them available at district level. We need a new framework for consultations, next year, among the different agencies on the functions the district councils will discharge. As part of this process there will be consultations, led by the new Minister for Local Government, with the National Assembly. District council elections will be held in 2018.

Mr Speaker, in regards to schools, clinics and regional health centres, we want their management and staff to have more responsibilities and control over operations with the objective of raising performance and quality of service.

The elderly

The elderly people, too, need our attention. All agencies concerned need to provide good service to our elderly people, with compassion, with the objective of maintaining the dignity they deserve during their retirement!!

Economic direction

Mr Speaker,

We will continue with the economic direction, based on macro-economic sustainability and stability, which we began in 2008. As I said before, we will establish new policies and procedures to include these three elements – good governance, transparency and accountability – in order to facilitate economic activities and create the space for the private sector to grow.

The government plays the role of facilitator. As facilitator in an environment whereby institutions which have the roles of regulators discharge their functions in accordance with the law and apply justice, and whereby government policies are administered without complexities.

Poverty

Mr Speaker,

We have a problem of poverty in the country. Poverty has many faces. What is important is to have a new partnership to overcome this real challenge. We need a collective effort and a new commitment to lift our people who have fallen into poverty. We need to readjust our policies and give existing agencies new means to target all the cases.

The following are some measures government has taken:

- We have increased the pension for citizens who have reached retirement age.
- We have increased national minimum salary and eliminated income tax on the salaries of workers who earn less.

During the coming weeks we will present a bill of law on Progressive Income Tax.

Government will also propose a law on employment following consultations which are ongoing. This includes provision for a 13th month salary for Seychellois workers.

Drugs and asset acquisition

Mr Speaker,

A problem that is eating away at our society is drugs. But unfortunately, much energy is wasted in the dissemination of calumnies and fabrication of lies about many personalities, including me -- without any regards for the consequences these have on the fight against drugs.

For me, my conscience is clear, Mr Speaker. Like you, we've worked for many years in the Ministry of Education. To inculcate good values in the lives of our children and youth. My devotion towards these values remains intact.

The drug scourge is a complex one. We today have rehabilitation programmes. There are many structures dealing with this scourge. We will continue to ensure that there is a programme which includes participation of all stakeholders, because we recognize that we need a collective and coordinated effort to solve the drug problem.

Today, Mr Speaker, I wish to announce certain measures that will curtail the ability of the drug traffickers to enjoy, accumulate and distribute their ill-gotten wealth.

We will make it mandatory to make payments for asset-acquisition through banks.

This means that henceforth the condition for the registration and transfer of vehicle ownership requires proof of banking transaction from the account of the buyer of the vehicle to the account of the seller of the vehicle.

- This will apply similarly to land transactions;
- Similarly to transactions of shares in companies.

These are the first administrative directives I've given to the departments concerned.

Mr Speaker,

I recognise that for a vast majority of us, the purchase of vehicles, purchase of land, or purchase of shares in companies -- transactions we do rarely in our lives -- are done through banks, and that the money is clean. I salute the families who have had the honor and opportunity to do this. The measures I have just announced target individuals who are using the system to launder ill-gotten gains.

These specific measures will not eliminate drugs overnight. Not next week. They represent additional tools we have to utilize to combat this scourge.

Mr Speaker, it takes a community to raise a child. Similarly, it takes a community to maintain the good surround in which an individual will not feel the need to abuse any substance.

Declaration of assets

Mr Speaker,

Presently we have a system whereby senior officials are required to declare their estates in accordance with the Public Officers Ethics Act. In a small country like Seychelles, if we continue to accuse all politicians of stealing public money, when there is no system in place preventing people from making such accusations without proof, we will have a country where nobody will want to become politicians. I

have become a politician not because of money. I entered politics with one objective, and that is to serve our people and do good for them.

Therefore, I welcome the principle and proposal from the other side of the house for elected politicians to make public declarations of their assets. I have requested the Attorney General's Office to draft new legislation that will, as from January 2017, require all politicians who are in elected positions, including ministers, to publicly declare their estates.

People I wish to be part of my team

Mr Speaker,

To enable me to discharge my functions as chief executive, it is important that I have a team. In line with Article 63(1) of our Constitution, this morning I presented to you Honorable Speaker, the list of people I wish to be part of my team.

It is important that we know that the appointments of Vice-President, Designated Minister, Ministers, and ambassadors have to be done with the approval of the National Assembly. I am aware that the approval requires at least 17 votes.

I ask each honorable member to carefully examine this list when it is put on the Order Paper by Mr Speaker, and I wish to get the necessary support for this team which will enable me to reshuffle the Council of Ministers and deliver on government work in the interest of Seychelles and the Seychellois people.

Commitment to work with the National Assembly

Mr Speaker,

As I stated on the day of my inauguration on 16th October -- and would like to repeat today -- I am committed to work with the National Assembly for the welfare of our people and in the interest of the Seychellois people.

Mr Speaker, it is my sincere wish that in the spirit of working together with the National Assembly, in the coming days we will agree on the modalities of our meetings whereby we will discuss issues of national interest which will benefit all our people.

National unity and reconciliation

Mr Speaker, on the day of my inauguration as President, I spoke about national unity and reconciliation. Once again -- and before our National Assembly -- I want to renew my commitment, so that together we will work towards this objective which will bring our people together even more. Our National Assembly, under your leadership, has an important role to play in promoting unity, tolerance, and mutual respect. This will help strengthen respect, tolerance and unity in our population.

To conclude, Mr Speaker, I thank you and the National Assembly for listening to me today. And I wish all honorable success in their work.

