

Ladies and Gentlemen good morning

It gives me great pleasure indeed to be with you here today to represent a group of 115 islands found 1,000 miles from anywhere in Indian Ocean - The Republic of Seychelles.

Indeed I can attest to the fact that this is the first time that this small island state finds itself represented from the ministry with portfolio responsibility for gender and for this I am grateful for the support of UNIFEM.

Women in Seychelles, can be said to be a privileged race compared to many of our sisters in Africa, and women in many parts of the world. Many of our practical, our basic needs have been met and we have achieved almost full practical empowerment with constitutional and equal rights to work, to education, to the provision of health care, the right to vote, land ownership and inheritance. In fact, Seychelles is a country where women and girls can be said to have advantages over men and boys. (to the point where we are now seriously considering how to find ways to empower our men)

Since gaining our independence from Britain in 1976 we were governed by a coalition government until 1977 and following a coup in 1977 we have been governed by one major party (currently called Parti Lepep) and we have seen our democracy evolve from a one-party state to one where we multiparty democracy now reigns. The political transition has been smooth and peaceful throughout all these years, national unity, pride and aspirations to bring our country to greater heights override ideological and economic differences. This is reflected in the Mo Ibrahim rankings which often finds Seychelles ranked in the higher rankings among African countries for Good Governance (In 2007, we were 2<sup>nd</sup>)

Our Constitution, which is the supreme law of the country, adopted in 1993 is one which ensures equal opportunity and protection for our men as well as

our women. Article 27 of Constitution of the Third Republic provides the right to equal protection of the law ...”.

In every sphere of society we find gaps to redress. We hope to achieve the international norms we abide to, and as a population of 85,000 people, over the past 30 years we have tended to hover at the 30% mark, but we must now work hard at achieving the 50% ratio. Up to this day, Seychelles has not implemented affirmative action in order to enable women to accessing the higher echelons of power, it has always been a natural process and it is hoped that the same situation will prevail and gender parity be achieved.

There already exists a critical mass of women in most decision making positions

29% in Cabinet of ministers (2/7)

42% of our Principal Secretaries (8/19) i.e. our Chief Exec Off in govt

24% of our parliamentarians (8/34)

64% of all District Administrators (Administrators of districts which make up our country – top local CEOs)

Education, as we all know is vital to women’s empowerment: Equality of access to education for girls has to a large extent been achieved -our literacy rate is estimated to be 96% for both men and women. Article 33 of our constitution recognises the right of every citizen to education, making the first 10 years of primary and secondary level education compulsory for all.

Enrolment and completion rates at the primary level are excellent. BUT - Major discrepancies have been recorded between the completion rates of girls and boys at secondary level, with more than twice of our boys dropping out of school before the completion of their fifth year (i.e. eleventh year of education) which is optional.

However when we get to Education at the tertiary level we find that this is dominated by boys. Although we have identified at the primary and lower secondary levels boys tend to underachieve when compared to girls, however

when it comes to pursuing tertiary level training which in most cases takes place overseas the figure for boys is greater than for girls.

Now we see the introduction of more distance learning programmes and certain advanced study programmes especially in the accounting fields which are followed by both genders. And more recently we have seen the introduction of the University of Seychelles which is running a number of tertiary level training in-country with the collaboration of the University of London as from the academic year 2010 which began in October 2009,. Currently, it is the business and administrative courses, and also environmental courses which are being taken on board,

One of our major activities this year is to finalise reporting on CEDAW which has been outstanding since our country signed the Convention in 1993. We are celebrating our coming of age since we celebrate 18 years of our signing of the CEDAW convention and we are expected to report in October of this year. This is a major activity which we are undertaking but with much internal support from committed individuals we are convinced that this will be done.

As far as the Beijing Platform for Action is concerned, our Major critical area of concern is domestic violence and this was identified after undertaking a national audit of our situation.

Amendments were made to Section 30 of our Penal Code was made as far back as 1996 - to provide better protection for victims of gender based violence. The exemption of the spouse was removed in order to recognise rape within marriage making it a sexual assault crime punishable by up to 20 years imprisonment. But ladies and gentlemen the difficulty lays not in the fact that there is redress for such crimes, the difficulty lies in ensuring that our men and women make full use of the law available to them.

We have carried out further research to identify the extent, the causes, and the consequences of domestic violence and the results were illuminating. A study undertaken in 2006 revealed that at least 31% of women have been victim to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives. It also revealed that 11% of women sampled admitted to having been raped by an intimate partner.

This study enabled us to develop a Strategic framework from a multisectoral dimension with the participation of all sectors of society which is currently in place. I cannot go into all the finer details, but in short, I can just add that some of the main proposals of the strategy are the enactment of a specific piece of legislation to concentrate on domestic violence, review existing legislation, create a specialist (speedy) criminal court to administer the new law, sensitise the judiciary, legislature, law enforcement agencies, and other service providers dealing with domestic violence.

I do not have the time to go into all the minute details but would just like to end by reaffirming that our small island state is one which is firmly committed to a people-centred development process, (and have adopted a holistic and integrated approach to our development since the WSSD of Copenhagen) and for us to be able to achieve and maintain this we must ensure the empowerment of all our people and to do this together. On Monday afternoon, Senora Linda Dunan advised us that no change can take place without the involvement of women. I would like to go one step further and end with this quote from Mother Teresa of Calcutta who said “I can’t do the things that you can do, and you can’t do the things that I can do, but together, we can do great things” meaning L&G that without the involvement and support and commitment of both genders, equity will continue to elude us.

I thank you for your attention