

**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT JAMES MICHEL ON THE OCCASION OF THE GRADUATION CEREMONY  
OF THE FIRST COHORT OF THE SEYCHELLES YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAMME**

**ICCS, FRIDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> JANUARY 2010**

Vice-President, Ministers, Members of the National Assembly,  
Young Leaders, Ladies and gentlemen,

The process of graduation is one which marks a transformation.

This graduation is one of many transformations that we are marking in our country.

Transformations that we are undertaking together.

Every transformation brings its own challenges. The mark of success is being able to overcome these challenges. The graduation- is being able to turn these challenges into opportunities.

I announced the Seychelles Young Leaders Programme in June 2007 in my national day speech. I saw the need for us to actively promote a leadership culture among our people. Leadership is not something which 'just happens'. Leadership has to be nurtured.

It is a nation that builds a leader. It is a nation that nurtures its leaders. It is a nation that must come together to prepare its children to be parents, to prepare its students to be teachers.

Leadership is never automatic.

Leadership is earned.

From the conversations I have had the privilege of having with the young men and women graduating today, I have been struck by their awareness of this.

Thus, today's graduation is not only a celebration of achievement.

It is also a celebration of opportunity. The opportunity for them to show Seychelles what they can do. The opportunity for Seychelles to benefit from their promise.

The young men and women, who embarked on this journey in January 2008, have learnt many things along the way.

They have proven themselves academically by excelling in an MA degree in Leadership and Strategy. They have developed projects in their districts and communities. They have worked as a team to address challenges together. They have applied themselves to many of the issues of major importance in our country.

Today they start another journey. The journey of making Seychelles ready for the future.

This journey must be founded in the spirit of solidarity and togetherness. 2009 was the year of *Koste Seselwa*, and we must carry the solidarity of this theme with us into 2010 and beyond. The Young leaders have thrived thanks to their spirit of teamwork.

Likewise, the success of government initiatives as a whole depends on all parties focusing on the greater good. I have said before that we have no time for 'little empires' in any part of our government. Departments must complement each other and be at the service of the Seychellois people. The first mark of leadership is that of service- service to the people.

For the long term efficiency of government, It is critical that those with more experience are available to give a helping hand to those just starting out. Every leader, every manager, every decision maker, must prepare their succession and offer support to those who walk the path behind them. This is the ongoing process of rejuvenation that is the essence of what the young leaders are about.

Our young leaders have also learnt the benefits of sharing best practices, strong communication strategies and full transparency. We need to move beyond the day to day bureaucracy and to do so we need professionals who are prepared to take responsibility for their actions. We need professionals who will communicate effectively with the Seychellois people. We need professionals who are accountable to the people.

One of the tenets of the young leaders programme has also been self empowerment and entrepreneurship. In fact I note that more than one of the candidates has become involved in setting up their own businesses. This is to the benefit of the country and I applaud their initiative and 'can-do' mentality. Today's ceremony is a reminder of the rainbow of opportunities that exist for the youth of our country.

We all know how 2009 has been a difficult year. But 2009 has also shown us that we can achieve many things that many may have thought impossible.

The Young Leaders programme has aimed to inculcate this spirit of innovation, this spirit of making things happen. We can make so many opportunities for ourselves when we are united in our purpose.

The Young Leaders programme also recognises that to be ready for the future, we need a professional workforce which is multi-skilled and adaptable. We have already seen how many young Seychellois have taken up new jobs that have been created- and sometimes in areas that we did not expect. We have seen how many persons previously employed in government have forged ahead towards new horizons either in a different sector or as owner of their own

business. We have seen how despite the tribulations of the world financial system, we have managed to continue to develop new facets to our international business sector.

Our workforce has proved its mobility, its adaptability and its competitiveness. In fact we can go even further, and note how many Seychellois are working for international organisations and multinational companies around the world. Our government's commitment to education and training means that we have trained for our development but also for the world. And this is a mark of our strength and of our potential. The young leaders programme is a further milestone in the investment we are making in our people.

As I speak to you today, we have 54 students enrolled in the inaugural class of the university of Seychelles. We have 229 students studying around the world on pre-service training. We have 50 persons studying on in-service training. We have 47 people studying at various institutions to work in our tanker programme. We have 34 students enrolled in the new cohort of Young Leaders.

This represents a total annual investment of over SCR 100 million.

This is the investment that makes us ready for the future! And this is the investment that my government will continue to make in the coming years.

Before concluding, I would also like to note that one of the biggest strengths of the young leaders programme is that it has embedded its concept of leadership within our community. All participants had the opportunity to work within the district and develop themselves by helping the community.

I have put a lot of emphasis on the empowerment and autonomy of our districts and I will continue to do so in the years ahead. I am proud that our young leaders have been able to also get involved at the district level as all leadership starts at community level.

Today, we salute those leaders, many who give up their personal time and resources time, to contribute at district level, to make things happen for their communities.

I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to the management of the Young Leaders Programme. You have provided the guidance and direction necessary to build a team of leaders. Without your drive and commitment we would not be able to see the dream come to fruition.

The young men and women who are graduating today have learnt a lot over the last 2 years. They have prepared themselves for the future, for any eventuality that fate may throw at them.

We are one of the smallest sovereign states in the world. When the planet shakes, the waves created can seem very big from where we are.

But by investing in a well-trained crew, the smallest vessel can face the roughest sea.

Our crew are the centre of our development vision. This is why we have developed the young leaders programme. This is also why we are extending it to the Police and the military.

The world is a very different place today, from when I first announced the programme in 2007. When I launched the programme, I invested the future of our country in our young generation who were already playing a major part in our country's development. Young people are already leaders in our development, and it is for that reason that we said, 'the future starts today'.

Together with the young leaders who are graduating today, we are proud to say as a nation, that we are ready for today. We are ready for tomorrow. Yes, we are ready for the future.

Thank you