

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we have come from all the compass points this week to work together for Seychelles at this 2010 Tourism Marketing Meeting, it means we believe that **Together, we are ready for the future!**

Teamwork has been the key to our success in 2009. As the clouds of recession were gathering over the world economy, we all knew we had to come together for Seychelles.

In 2009, *Koste Sese/wa*, was not simply a slogan, but a call to action for everyone who cares about Seychelles.

That call has been answered emphatically.

And as we begin 2010, it gives me great pleasure to see such a diverse group of enthusiastic and dynamic people working together as a team for Seychelles.

We are happy to see new faces joining the old hands as we get ready for the future!

I wish you all a warm welcome.

It is just over a year ago that my Government decided to change the dynamics of the Tourism industry, to ensure that we could survive the turbulence of the global crisis.

The 'Affordable Seychelles' campaign has ensured that we maintain our arrivals while also increasing the bed occupancy level for the small, Seychellois-owned establishments.

Particular attention has been given to "branding", resulting in greater press coverage for our islands - from the display of our logo on London taxis, to a similar campaign involving a Formula 2 racing car.

The reopening of the UK Office; the strengthening of all other Seychelles Overseas Offices; and the repositioning of Seychellois nationals in our overseas offices are all contributing to a revitalisation of the Seychelles Tourism industry.

The heightened cooperation between the Seychelles Tourism Board and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is opening new avenues for our country overseas, maximising our resources, and opening doors for our nationals to proudly represent our country. I will continue to champion Seychelles' tourism credentials as part of our foreign policy. Last year I have personally led demarches to kindle interest in new markets in China, South Korea and the Middle East.

Our national airline has been buffeted by the increased competition of an already cutthroat industry- but it has survived thanks to the diligence and commitment of its staff. Air Seychelles has worked hard amidst these challenges to be a reliable partner for our tourism industry. With new innovative ideas, I am confident that Air Seychelles will fly in brighter skies in 2010. The

partnerships built in 2009 are the basis for new and even more dynamic partnerships with other tourism operators.

The world financial crisis has dampened investment perspectives around the world. Amidst the gloom of international markets however, the Ephelia Resort will open its doors in Seychelles on 1st February. Already the resort has employed 359 Seychellois and may create over a 1,000 additional jobs industry wide. We must continue to innovate in this way to create opportunities for the Seychellois people.

The Seychelles Tourism Academy is making good progress, and more than ever we are seeing young Seychellois workers taking up the call to contribute in the tourism sector. Every Seychellois who is working in the tourism sector is an Ambassador of our country. They make us proud every day.

Tourism is the mainstay for our economy and will continue to be for years to come. Our investment in our young people is crucial for us to be ready for the future.

And we need to do more.

I firmly believe that we can develop even more fruitful partnerships between the public and private sectors to make training in the tourism sector even more effective. This is one of the challenges that I ask that we take up today.

The partnership between government and the private sector has been excellent in 2009. The reorganization of STB to ensure increased private sector participation has re-galvanized the industry.

Seychelles has seen a drop of only 1% over our tourism arrivals in 2009. This is far better than any of our immediate competitors and reflects the commitment and drive of all our tourism professionals.

Yes, revenues are down- as they are around the world. But the Seychelles brand has created a 'buzz' in the industry. We have created a sense of momentum that we can build on. We are ready to move forward with confidence.

These are difficult and testing times for any country, particularly those that depend on tourism, and we need the maximum commitment of everyone, from all sectors of society, if we are to achieve our goals for the future, from both economic and social perspectives.

Today, I salute the work of the Seychelles Tourism Board and its two Committees, and that of the Seychelles Hotel and Tourism Association. They have done us and their industry proud.

This vibrant partnership between Government, the Trade and our national airline has been responsible for the thrust of new and innovative ideas in our marketing and promotional strategy.

What better way to sum up this new spirit than '**Sesel Sa**' - a strong sense of pride for our country and an appreciation for the unique way of life of the Seychellois people.

Seychelles is a very special place.

We are 'unique by a thousand miles'. We are 'another world'.

The things that set us apart from the rest of the world, perhaps more than our beaches and unspoilt environment, are the Seychellois way of life, the things we have and the things we do that are uniquely Seychelles and Seychellois.

We are meeting today to consolidate our industry. This consolidation depends first of all on our unity of purpose, and then of moving forward with determination and focus.

In an intensely competitive world, our people, more than ever, have to seize every available opportunity so that we can benefit from this industry. We cannot be complacent. The future of our tourism industry is ours. Together we have to mould it.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and a pleasant week of work and leisure.

Thank you.