

The State of the Nation Address

by the President of the Republic, Mr Wavel Ramkalawan

22 February 2024

Mr Speaker and Mrs Mancienne,

Linda,

Vice President Ahmed Afif,

Chief Justice of the Supreme Court,

President of the Court of Appeal,

Designated Minister,

Ministers,

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly,

Leader of the Opposition,

Leader of Government Business,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Attorney General,

Commissioner of Police,

Chief of the Defence Forces,

Members of the National Assembly,

Justices/Judges of the Court of Appeal,

Justices/Judges of the Supreme Court,

Clerk and Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,

Distinguished Guests;

Let me first of all Mr Speaker, express with immense emotion (on) the beautiful memorial offered by the Assembly this afternoon in memory of our sister, the Honourable Rosie Bistoquet; all the testimonies expressed by all the different Members were really touching and I believe that you have given Honourable Bistoquet the honour she truly deserves. And I join with you, the National Assembly, after this tragedy, to share once again my sincere condolences with the family, but also with you, the people who worked closely with Miss Rosie; I too, was given the privilege of working with her, to accompany her, and so we are all really in a moment of suffering. I pray that what she worked (for), the work she did for our country, Seychelles, will always be distinguished, will always be remembered and as we have all prayed, that her soul will repose in peace.

Mr Speaker, I also take this opportunity - as the second part of your ceremony was to swear in two new Members - to congratulate the two new Members, two new women to enter the National Assembly, Honourable Anne Bistoquet and Honourable Rachel Spiro. I hope that you will have a pleasant time in the National Assembly, that you will enjoy your time, in the debates, in the National Assembly. And through the contributions you will make (on) our country, our Legislative programmes and the debates, you will help to enrich that debate.

Mr Speaker, at the beginning of my address, I also want to remember some of our Seychellois who have left us since last year. We had several persons who were popular, but we also had ordinary people who have left a mark on our society. Just by mentioning a few of the names without specifying exactly what they did in our society and how they were Seychellois children for whom we have a lot of appreciation, I think that we will know exactly what they did - when I mention persons such as Tony Mathiot, Norbert Salomon, Father Gustave Lafortune, Sister Josephine Bonnelame, Patrick Stravens, Norville Ernesta, Terry Servina, Margaret Pouponneau, André Valmont, Archbishop Emeritus French Chang-Him, Michel Paddy Savy, Raymond Hoareau, Praslin, Charlette Ally, Wahida Payet, Dorothy Lafortune, Hakeem Antoine, Yacinthe Napoleon, Robert Morgan, Lewis Alexis. And I could carry on because there have been many of our Seychellois who have made different contributions and have also lived simple lives, lives which demonstrated the values which we, as a people, attach ourselves to.

And so, I pray that, firstly, there will be many more Seychellois who will emulate them, who will follow the good examples they have left for our country and that through this our country will be enriched, and our country becomes that place which we today call paradise and that generations (to come) are able to continue to live with pride, with resilience and that we will always make our flag rise as high as is possible.

Mr Speaker, Article 65 of our Constitution requires that the President, at the beginning of each year, deliver a message on the state of the Nation to the Assembly. And, I, when I consider this Constitutional obligation, see it as a moment where we, with the Assembly and with the Seychellois people, come to

talk about what is going on in our State; we come to express the truth and together we look at where we stand, what is happening, and how we can advance even further ahead. Of course, a President gets the opportunity to do this at least five times during a five-year mandate, and today is my fourth State of the Nation (address), and next year, with God's grace, it will be my fifth for this first mandate which will end in 2025.

And so, Mr. Speaker, what I see today, is a dynamic country, a complicated country, a country which has achieved much that is great but at the same time, a country which, when it looks to the future, sees many challenges ahead. And in the midst of all these situations, it is of the utmost importance that the people of Seychelles preserve its unity; that the Seychellois people guards its spirit where discrimination in any form is absent. We must hold on to the spirit of reconciliation and we must also protect the spirit that Seychelles belongs to each one of us and not only to certain people and that it is together, no matter our religion, the colour of our skin, irrespective of our political beliefs or our sexual orientation that we all form one people. And that is the Seychellois people.

Mr. Speaker, I think that if we can hold on to this unity and all walk in the same direction with principles that unite, principles that will make us each of us live stronger, little Seychelles - which today already stands as a model in the Indian Ocean, a model on the level of Africa, but not only in Africa and the Indian Ocean, little Seychelles which stands today as a model on the world stage, there is no one who will stand in its way. And so, my first call to the people of Seychelles today is for us to preserve our unity, to keep that spirit that our country stands above all; we have to make our flag fly as high as possible. We must keep in mind that our

pride comes from us helping our brother, helping our sister and in so doing, another generation will be able to live with greater trust and more robustly and that for generations to follow, Seychelles will always be a word and a name that brings great pleasure and brings much pride.

Mr. Speaker, At the same time, I think that – you know, sometimes there is confusion and people are confused as to what ‘Government’ is. And this is something that I must say that today in 2024, that sometimes people forget what ‘Government’ means. People think that Government is over there and that the People are in opposite direction, one is in the North and the other is in the South. And so, it is why, today, often people think that they will ask Government to do this, ask Government to do that. And therefore, people have forgotten that ‘Government’ starts with me as an individual, that it is what I do, the way I take care of myself, the way I, as a student, go to school and study. And as I grow into an adult in sparing no effort in applying myself so that I am able to pass my exams in order for me to be able to get a profession, for me to be able to sustain my family - that too is part of ‘Government’.

And it is also this that people forget sometimes, Mr Speaker, that a country has only one Government; there is only one Government, it is the administration that changes, but it will always be the Government of Seychelles. And it is for this reason why what yesterday’s Administration did will follow into today’s Administration, and what today’s Administration does will follow into tomorrow’s Administration. So it is important, when I make the call for citizens to live in unity, that our citizens always put their shoulders together, for me to also ask that

citizens assume their responsibilities. Because it is only when each one of us assumes our responsibilities that our country's Government functions properly, and that our country's Government becomes stronger because we will all be making our contribution.

And Mr Speaker, you know, I have also noticed that today, we from time to time hear people say, 'We will sue Government, something has happened and we will sue the Government. We will look for this from Government.' But I want to say to the Seychellois people that when you are suing Government, in fact you are in suing your (own) self, because Government is not an entity in itself which has with a large coffer, and when you sue it, it just goes to these large coffers called Government coffers and it takes out money to pay you.

When you sue Government, Government takes the same money which you yourself contribute – that you contribute as tax for it to pay you. Government takes money that your wife, your husband contributes, that your children, your uncle, your cousins, your friends (contribute) for it to pay you. And so, I want us to grasp the concept of Government. And if we understand it well, and at the same time work to strengthen Government, to assist and accompany it, I think that our country will become much more pleasant to live in.

And now, Mr Speaker, this brings me to another point. Today, in our country, we are trying to conduct different training programmes so we can impart those leadership (skills) to those persons holding leadership positions. And you will recall, Mr Speaker that a group of Principal Secretaries, CEOs and top executives followed an Executive Leadership Programme through the U.A.E. and this was precisely to help them to look at things in a different way, to view leadership

differently. And we know also that there are other training programmes. And right now, there is training going on so we can make people understand that in this civil service – and this is essential for us to comprehend – that when you are in the civil service, the word ‘sabotage’ is not supposed to exist. In the civil service you come to work for your Government, you come to work for Seychelles.

And here, Mr Speaker, I want to say clearly that in the year 2024 there will be no place in the civil service for any sabotage or foot-dragging. And here I want to make it clear, Seychelles is indeed for all her children but bad children who do not want to work for Seychelles will be asked to stop work and to find another job. I announce this really clearly, very early on, so that we don’t come later to speak of political victimisation. If you wish to work, work. There is work available for all Seychellois, but if you do not wish to work, we will not be able to do otherwise.

Mr Speaker, we must, within the context of our government, within the context of our democracy, continue to find ways to reinforce our democracy. And today, the Seychellois people has come to know a new freedom of expression. Everyone expresses themselves today. People are free to express themselves. And via their social media (accounts), via demonstrations and through manifestations, anyone can walk with their banner and support whosoever they wish, they have the right to express themselves. And through this we have made sure that we reinforce our institutions.

And Mr Speaker, our institutions have felt that they are so strengthened that today, even government, in the Executive - even the Executive sometimes finds itself in certain difficulties, because when the institution say No, there is no one who can say Yes. And the Executive makes sure that there is, at all times,

independence and there is respect for these institutions. And so, we will continue to strengthen our democracy and while we are reinforcing our democracy, there are certain things that we demand. We request that the truth becomes a principle we never abandon, that all who are expressing themselves come to speak the truth and through the truth we will be able to educate our people. And when I speak of our people we are speaking of unity and all that. I want to see an educated people, a people which does not allow itself to be misled.

And so here I want, principally, to mention the role of the media. Mr Speaker, sometimes, as leaders we are scared to mention the media because we think that if we mention the media, we are interfering with the media. No! There is no interference. The role of the media needs to be one that brings balanced reporting, it needs to be one to assist that Seychellois - when he watches the programme 'Aktyalite' or the '8 o'clock News' or he reads 'Nation' or reads 'TODAY' or reads any newspaper, what he reads pertains to the truth and that it does not give rise to an outcry amidst our people where it is not warranted. And that is also why today when I launch this appeal to the media, it is to ensure that they produce balanced reports and not reports that are one-sided.

I also want to say to our people, 'People of Seychelles, just because something is on Facebook does not mean that it is the truth, it is not just because something is on SBC, the media financed by the State, or because it is on an independent media or because it is in an international newspaper that it is the truth.' And so, 'People of Seychelles, my people, let us learn to listen, analyse and then, comment. Everything that is put before you, listen, listen to it well, analyse it and

evaluate it. “Is this likely?” “Is this true?” And if we are not too sure, then let us look for more information.’

And Mr Speaker, while I am saying this, I want to tell the Seychellois people, that today you have an Administration that listens, an Administration that if further points arise even after it has completed undertaking consultations, is prepared to withdraw certain regulations. We are prepared to withdraw certain decisions which we have made to allow us to again listen and to reevaluate – so don’t be afraid of this Government. It is not a Government that is not prepared to listen, on the contrary, it is a government that is ready to listen. And it is for this reason that sometimes – and there have been several such instances – where when consultations have been made and then certain citizens forget that consultations were undertaken, and then there is an outcry, an outcry sometimes driven by politicians themselves, and we have seen that government is ready to listen.

And here I want to give you an example that Government listened and since last night. Firstly, when I say tell the truth, it is false when you say 30 Takamaka trees are going to be felled. No! that is false, you need to give the facts, 30 trees, amongst which there are Takamaka trees. And so there was some outcry from different the environmental organisations. And Mr Speaker, following their representations made by these environmental organisations, I, together with the Minister of Environment and Minister Devika for Entrepreneurship, have said, ‘Pause’. There were no trees felled today. Tomorrow, together with the two Ministers, I invite any of you who wish to come – I would think that the Honourable for Beau Vallon will want to come – we will return to Beau Vallon, so we can see exactly how to make things move forward. And so, where there is a time to listen to

representations, we go back to take appropriate action; however, it does not mean that that these representations will always end in the way which those who are pushing these ideas forward wish.

And so Mr Speaker, it is important for us, when we are strengthening our democracy, to fight against corruption. And corruption, today, continues in certain instances, to ravage our country. In minor cases you see where corruption is and fortunately, we have been able in several instances put our finger on the corruption and stopped it.

Mr Speaker, in the strengthening of our democracy there must be continued respect for all other institutions, for example, respect for the Legislative branch, respect for the Judiciary branch, respect for the office of the Attorney-General who is the principal prosecutor in our country. And all this will ensure that we as a people live under what we love to speak about, and you in the Assembly love to speak on, and this is the 'rule of law', and the 'rule of law' no citizen should confuse with their own political affiliation.

And I have heard of the instances where people have misunderstood the rule of law simply because they voted for a particular political party and now think that the law should not apply to them. No, Mr Speaker, in Seychelles the law applies for all Seychellois, and if we want to live as good citizens we should abide by the law.

And precisely, I will also today announce that in the first part of this year, in relation to our democracy – to ensure that we come out of that phase where one hears that elections will take place in 2024, elections will be held at the beginning

of 2025, etc, etc. – Mr Speaker, I will, we will invite you as the National Assembly to approve the 11th Constitutional Amendment.

And this 11th Constitutional Amendment comes further to a promise in LDS's manifesto upon which I was elected, and this is for us to have fixed dates for elections in our country, Seychelles. And so, in the first quarter of this year, this Law for the amendment of the Constitution will come before the Assembly and I count on you to receive your support so that our country can make another step forward. And amongst those amendments while we are looking at fixed dates, we will also remove all that relates to the immunity that a president holds. And so, we will, once and for all, remove those three words that say that "A President after he leaves office, it is in the first three years that you have the right to bring a case against him, and then it finishes"; this too will go.

And the Amendment will also remove the Article which gives the President the possibility to resign and to immediately call for elections so he can stand again, to test the waters as we say. There will be none of this testing of waters, if a President resigns, this means he leaves and new elections will be held.

And Mr. Speaker we will also redefine the instances under which the Vice-President may continue the mandate that a President holds, after he is elected, and where new elections will be held. As I have said, all this will be put before you shortly.

Mr Speaker, when I was the Leader of the Opposition I brought a Motion before this Assembly, and this Motion was to establish the TRNUC, a Commission which would seek for the truth, reconciliation, national unity for our people. That law was passed and President Faure assented to that law. Because President Faure

and I were of the same mind as to what had happened in the country, Seychelles. The Commission did its work and the Commission handed its report to me in March 2023.

Mr Speaker, Today, as requested by the TRNUC report, I, solemnly before the People of Seychelles, as Head of State, want to present to all victims and to all Seychellois the excuses of the country Seychelles. I want to express regret for all that occurred, all the suffering that our People went through during those dark years. And therefore, I hope that all the victims, including you, Mr Speaker, and everyone else, will accept that the Seychellois State, under my direction, we are saying sorry for what happened and let us move forward towards Unity, towards Reconciliation, and towards the Truth, at all times.

Mr Speaker, ever since the report was put before me, and in fact, even before the report was presented, I had already started to make certain steps, in order to allow us to move towards the Reconciliation that this People needs. And we are at the moment where we have completed the amendments to the State Land and River Reserves Act. And so, the programme whereby some of the land that have remained undeveloped can be returned to their original owners will be launched soon because the law is being passed, has already been passed, I mean.

There are many other elements from this report that we will be putting in application shortly, but I also know that the biggest subject that the victims who came forward are speaking of is that of Compensation. I want to thank the National Assembly for the debate you held on the TRNUC report, and I wish, with all honesty, to also share the dilemmas that you encountered while you were addressing the subject of compensation. And I want to say to the Seychellois

People, especially to the victims, that paying for any compensation remains the biggest issue, the biggest obstacle for our nation, and for the Government of the day, for this Administration. The sum is enormous and therefore, together we will have to make other propositions as to how we will be able to compensate the victims who suffered. We have all had the chance to follow the deliberations of the TRNUC and so I wish for the Seychellois to reflect on this and to make certain recommendations.

And currently, we also have certain other compensations that the Government must pay out for – there is La Misère, PUC Praslin, all those compensations for fungus, and there are also other compensations that we must pay. And I want to say Mr Speaker, that up till the present I find myself in really interesting situations because I was the one who brought the Motion so we could establish the TRNUC, and today I find myself asking for forgiveness on behalf of the Seychellois State; La Misère compensation, I helped victims fight for compensation, and today it is our administration who needs to pay out; PUC Praslin, it was I who, together with Mr Albert Philöe, came before the National Assembly to fight for them and today it is my own administration which must find the money to pay.

Fungus, the problems from the *National Assembly and all that followed, where we have – the National Library, where I was one of those from the Opposition who fought for people to get their compensation, today, I find myself as one who must ensure that they receive their compensation. And so, Mr Speaker, life is fun, life is interesting and life is sweet. Let us live it each day with appreciation and let us understand that we might be in such and such a position today but tomorrow we may be in another position. What is important is that we have principles – it is

not because yesterday you were in the Opposition and today you are in government that you 'forget'. We must continue to remember those principles. In all, expenses incurred by Government for all the work done by this Commission has cost the State the sum of SCR54.1m. And all this Seychellois must know.

Mr Speaker, when we are looking at the state of our country and when we are looking at the main principles, but also at the same time when we are looking at our People in particular, I think it is important that we always keep our fingers on this People's pulse. And I know that today the subject of welfare and the subject of cost of living are one of those subjects people are speaking of.

Because, Mr Speaker, one thing that I wish to make clear is that Wavel Ramkalawan is a person who gets around. And I speak with everybody. And I understand the suffering some people are going through. And this is why when we start, for example with the subject of welfare, it is important for me to say to the Seychellois people; we have had to engage in major cleaning up, because if there is one place where corruption was rife, there was a lot of favouritism and even victimization, it is where welfare is concerned.

And today, we have been able to see greater clarity and even before we go into the year of elections, the government and this administration has decided to undertake particular actions. You will recall how on two occasions, at the beginning of the last year and again later last year, we announced and it has all become a reality – how we increased the amount of money that people in need are receiving, and as of January of this year, there are eight of the different benefits which have been increased. And I appreciate that ASP has taken their time to invite all the Members of the Assembly, and today all of you Members of

the Assembly have received a comprehensive explanation as to exactly which of these benefits have been increased - be they benefits for paternity, maternity, for the semi-orphans, for children who have been abandoned, or for the orphans, for children in foster care, for the foster parents and even allowances for the expectant mothers, especially those coming from Praslin and La Digue - how all these have been increased.

And Mr Speaker, the increase that has been passed is one that varies between 81% and 233%. It is this, a Government, an Administration that looks at its people, which feels the sufferings of its people, and so it comes in to offer a solution. And we have also added another benefit and this is for the parents, for the mothers who, instead of having just one child, gets more than one child. They too, we have not forgotten because we know that there is even more pressure when two children, two babies are born.

And so Mr Speaker, we are looking at how we can take greater care of our people. And at the same time, the ASP and Social Services are looking at ways how someone who is in need can receive this assistance faster. And we are cutting out more of the bureaucracy, which was necessary at certain moments for us to put everything in order, and so today things have taken a new turn.

Mr Speaker, this applies to Home Care as well which under the new Home Care Agency is taking off anew, and today, things are moving. But I must also make an appeal to our Seychellois. We need to make an appeal to get better home carers so that we can attract people who can take on greater responsibility. Because you can have a Home Care Agency but if you don't have that carer to assign to that person in need, to give to that elder, it becomes really difficult, and I think it must

be for this reason that there are many Seychellois who are opting for a foreigner from abroad to come take care of their elderly mother, of their elderly father.

Thus, Mr Speaker I am also making a call to the Seychellois people to come forward when we venture into this, when the Home Care Agency conducts training to raise the level (of care), to improve standards, so that we can assist with this. But we also see that we continue to experience more problems on the Social front. We continue to find people who are homeless, people who need to go into institutions, so I now make an appeal to the families that we keep a closer eye on our beloved. And in the context of the family, this will help towards us giving that person what they need.

And precisely, Mr Speaker, when we once again look at the cost of living, unfortunately we find that the cost of living has not gone up only in Seychelles. And many of the Seychellois who travel who tell you on their return from their trips abroad – whether they go to Dubai, whether they travel to South Africa, or they go to Mauritius, those countries that Seychellois patronize more – that there are certain items which are cheaper in Seychelles than in those countries. Even England. I was shocked when one of my relatives who was here on a visit - there were certain items that he was buying here to take back with him to England, because some things cost more in England than what he was able to get here.

Therefore, we, as a Government, as an Administration, are again looking at the role that STC plays. And Minister Hassan and the Board of STC are already starting a conversation for us to find out how we would be lower the price of as many commodities as we can, whether they be those approximately twenty basic

commodities, or also be the supply of construction materials, and all the other fields in which STC today has a role to perform.

And we hope that later this year, I suppose within the first six months, we will be able to see how the price of these commodities will be able come down and our population have a greater access to these commodities and how their money will be able to serve them for longer.

And now I want to make a call to the private sector, I want to say to the private sector, join this Administration in this effort to reduce the cost of living. Those in the private sector who import commodities, especially basic commodities, don't just look at the profit but see also how we can help our people to better understand and at the same time to attain a higher standard of living.

But Mr Speaker, we can speak of Welfare, and we can speak about the cost of living. But it is important for us today, and I hope that during your debates you will be able to put the emphasis on Employment, to tell people that everything begins with a stable job. That before we start thinking of Welfare, especially when we still possess all our strength, let us think about how we can get a job, and how that job will be able to lead us on the path towards stability and prosperity.

Too many of our youth today are not in employment. But even if the number of youth who are not in employment is below 5% of our population, it is still 5%, and 5% is too much. So let us encourage our youth to go in a direction where they will get a job, where they will behave themselves, and where they apply themselves so that tomorrow they will be able to stand on their feet and make a contribution – contribution to the Pension Fund, contributions so that later in life they also will be able to get more solid returns.

And so now, I also want to say that our Employment Department is always on the lookout for programmes in order for them to be able to help the youth acquire skills. That is not all, we are also continuing with the localisation programme where more Seychellois can enter the work place, especially in those higher positions. And here I am happy to say that in the tourism industry, we have seen that there are some of our Seychellois who have been able to undergo their training and who today hold management positions, and it is they who are leading those different institutions. And so, this we are carrying on with. And the only thing that I will say to Seychellois is this, that the opportunities are there, seize the opportunity and make things move.

And, at the same time, as we are saying, there are many businesses who are looking for workers, and this where there are more people requesting GOPS for their businesses. But we Seychellois, let us take advantage of that opportunity, let us seize these opportunities and let us ensure that the money, instead of flowing to countries abroad, stays in our country Seychelles. Thus, on the employment front, you in the National Assembly, will be asked later this year to make your analysis of the new Employment Act so that we look at Employment in a new way.

Mr Speaker, all of us in this country wish to live in peace and security. And so today, I want to start by saying to the Commissioner of Police, here present, and Brigadier Rosette, who is here with you, 'Thank you very much for the way you help to keep the country in peace and security.' I also want to continue to encourage our youth to join the Police Force and the Defence Forces because their role is vital.

And here, Mr Speaker, I want to say that we must at the same time maintain a certain level of discipline of course, and I know there have been instances where things have not worked well. Here also, as I stated in the beginning, whether it be in the police or the military, when certain acts get out of control, the necessary steps are taken.

But I also want to emphasize that in this war against drugs, let us not sympathise with the traffickers, let us not sympathise with those who sow trouble in our communities. And here I also want to say thank you to all the residents of Corgat Estate, whose community lately, because of the exercises and the work undertaken by the police and the military, is today more peaceful and they can breathe easier. And I can reassure you, and reassure all the other communities that are a mess today, that action will be taken and we will make sure that this war against drugs is one that continues.

And so Mr Speaker, I want to make it clear today, our administration and the party which I represent is against drugs. Can I make an appeal to all other political parties in this country that they also clearly stand against drugs which is invading and ravaging our society? Let us not use drugs as a political tool.

Mr Speaker, In this same spirit, when we are considering how we can move forward and how we can help our people avail of various new facilities, I wish to announce that we are looking closely at our people who are living with the diaspora. And shortly, the Immigration Office will be able to offer our citizens who live in the United Kingdom, France and the United Arab Emirates their biometric passport service. In addition, in our efforts to facilitate obtaining all those things, all Seychellois will soon be able to procure their certificates of birth, marriage,

death and others via the computer, online. And once again all of this will make things move forward. Another new facility, a second facility for Seychellois to get their ID so that they can go to work, will be installed. And so more people will be able to progress.

Mr Speaker, In our country today, when we look at our youth, and at the development of sports, it is important for us to make an appeal, and I am sometimes saddened when I see the federations and the associations going through difficulties, and I see that ultimately it is the athletes who suffer.

And here again, sometimes people say, “Why doesn’t Government intervene?” No! Where sports is concerned, it is clear, Government cannot intervene. I know, for example, that right now, various things are happening within the football federation. But if government intervenes, FiFA will ban our football association from participating in any football competitions. If we intervene in what is happening in Basketball, it will be the same outcome once again.

And so, I want to make an appeal Mr Speaker, to those federations and those associations to, when they elect their management (committee), to elect people who will be able to bring the sports forward. Because when they don’t, it is our youth who suffer. So let us not make our youth suffer. Because I want to see more youth in sports venues, more youth developing, more youth succeeding. And now that we will have our CJSOI which will be organised here next year as the Beach Soccer World Cup organised by FiFA here as well, I want to see that more of our youth find encouragement. And as a Government, what can we do? We can help improve the facilities.

As we speak, I want to say to our athletes that the track that will be laid at the Stad Linite has already arrived in the country and that early in March, the Chinese contractors will be in the country. And we hope that this year the Schools Athletics will be held at the Stad Linite on this new track.

But I also want to say that there have been other facilities which have been renovated, such as the Palais des Sports, tennis courts and many others as well.

And so, as Members of the Assembly, I want to tell you to organise more activities, the Administration will encourage you, this Administration will support you and so on the weekends, especially on Sundays, bring our youth to participate in football, in volleyball, in all the various sports – help to extract our youth from those bad influences. And I am happy, and I congratulate the SNYC which has gained fresh momentum, and who are encouraging the youth in whether it concerns music, or art, or any others which bring that spirit of positivity. And so, if we all, as a National Assembly and if the people of Seychelles, all the federations and all the associations, we too can bring this spirit of positivity, I say once more that nothing will stand in our way as a country.

And if, in addition, we can instill that spirit of positivity in the family and give the family more encouragement, once again we will be able to reduce domestic violence. We will be able to note a reduction in those challenges that our families are facing and we will see the prevention of those accidents. We will be able to educate our families and on top of this we will be able to build up our families so there will be more interest in what our children are doing at school and how we are able to give our children the necessary encouragement.

Mr Speaker, in the same spirit of the year 2024, and 2024 will once again be a year when this administration will use the money that the Seychellois people contribute through taxes and other ways for us to be able to undertake other projects, projects that will benefit the people of Seychelles. Amongst the major projects that we hope to begin and even complete this year – there are some that will of course take more time – there is the Port of Victoria which we are rehabilitating and extending its jetty by 300 metres, the new Seychelles Airport project whose master plan is in the final stages of preparation, the West Coast Road which this week we've had yet another overview of.

And here I join the Minister in thanking all the people who have given a part of their land for this project – yes, to all of you, Seychelles says 'Thank you'. But now, we make an appeal to those people who are still hesitating about giving a portion of their land, please think of Seychelles, don't just think of what you will get out of it. Consider that after all, the ambulance will travel on this road, the fire brigade will pass on it, the essential services will pass on it, and on top of that, even you will benefit from a road which is a lot more comfortable.

And on Praslin, of course, the Vehicle Testing Station will be completed soon, which means that safety standards will rise. There are the housing projects which we continue to place more emphasis on, housing projects some which require additional financing, which we continue to look for. There are many projects which will start this year, and if when we get to the month of June we can allocate even more money in building houses, we will do so.

With respect to the La Rosière school project, the first part will have been completed in the third term, and construction of the new block will commence in

June of this year. Drugs Rehabilitation Centre will be completed this year as well. The Remand Centre will be completed this year, (work on) the Maximum Security Prison has already started. SRC House, Carnegie Building, the Independence House renovation. The School of Agriculture where the youth will soon be able to once again enter their new school. The Perseverance Community Centre will go on tender in March after which and work will then start exactly like the Cascade Community Centre. The Les Mamelles Daycare, again this year. The Perseverance Police Station, the Coastguard Jetty, the Regatta site development, Victoria Waterfront, Ile du Port infrastructure development; there are many such projects for which I hope we will incur no delay.

And all of this Mr Speaker, is to make the lives of our people more comfortable, and so I ask that in the midst of all this, we, the Seychellois people, also play our role. Let us not destroy those infrastructure because we are after all the ones to use them; let us use them well.

And here I want to say to Honourable Adelaïde, the contract for the new Baie Lazare Clinic has been signed today and so as of this week, the contractor will be on site and you will be able to get on.

Mr Speaker, when we also speak of the projects at district level, there are many such projects being put forward to facilitate the lives of our people, whether they be small roads, more lights, steps, or the widening of roads. On Praslin, after 57 years Adam Estate now boasts a tarmac road, and there is more work being undertaken on Praslin and La Digue. And wherever we go in all districts on Mahé, we see things moving, when I leave home at Serret Road, I see that the residents

of St Louis who go down Biznak will no longer need to jump off the road to avoid vehicles, they will have their own pavement.

And so more Budget will, has already been allocated so the small projects in the districts, for example the felling of trees that pose a danger and other small projects can be undertaken.

In 2023 we did 151 small projects valued at SCR19.6 million. In 2024 we have increased this budget to reach SCR26 million and we hope to undertake 240 small projects. And we will have on top of this, as the Minister announced, SCR10 million so we can build more small roads.

And what this shows Mr Speaker, is that this administration is interested in its people. And if we are able to do all of these things, it is because we make sure that the money that comes into the State Coffers is well spent. Which means that we have eliminated corruption, that the Seychellois people is able to use properly whatever money they have contributed. And it is this that will enable to us extend assistance to more of our people.

And I have received several letters from people who are from Salazie, on Praslin - (for example) Chantal and her son who are going through difficulties, or it may be people from other districts. So, I want to say to the People of Seychelles, this Administration and my Government will continue to work to bring you relief but if when we install lights at Perseverance and the children then proceed to smash the lights come nighttime, we are destroying that community. So let us always take this into account.

And this is where, as I have said, Mr Speaker, we want to build the maximum number of houses possible, and I know that Minister Rangasamy wishes to see as

many of all these houses built so that this list becomes shorter and that people can build up their families properly, raise them well. And at the centre of all these plans is funding, of course, and we are speaking to different sources of financing so we can make things progress.

And in 2023, we worked really hard to ensure that the maximum number of people is able to get a plot of land, and now soon there will be a new Land Bank in the district of Anse Royale. Work has already started, and so we will be able to avail of this new Land Bank where once again, more Seychellois families will be able to get a parcel of land.

As I announced in this very place, those who see a plot of land of government land adjacent to where their parents reside, Mr Speaker, 2023 was the year where we gave many more people these small parcels of land. Small plots of 200 square metres, 300 square metres and 400 square metres where they have been able to build their houses and been able to design their plans. And so, we are carrying on with it.

And on top of this Mr Speaker, at the Planning (Authority) and here I congratulate the Planning Authority, there is good cooperation where we are able to see how we can fast track many of these tiny projects for our people. But here once again, I want to ask of the different agencies, please, when the plan lands in front of you, and you have 14 days in which to review that plan and to send your comments, please make them, do not put that project or that plan in a drawer where dust accumulates and the MNA must then make a call, someone else must make a call – a letter has to be sent to me. Let us do this, and if we do this we can build more of these houses as possible.

Mr Speaker, I must say that, and it is for this reason that I have said let us speak the truth, if we can speak the truth to this people, our people will see things differently and our people will not experience the frustration that it sometimes feels. And now for example, I want to say, our economy – all of the things that we are speaking of depends on our economy. And when our economy is doing poorly, we are of course not be able to accomplish those different things. We have seen that in 2023, our economy grew by 3.3%, and whilst we had thought that we would end 2023 with a Budget deficit, I want to say, Mr Speaker that we actually came out with a surplus of SCR 487.8 million which represents 1.7% of GDP.

Government debt, and here it shows how serious we are, government debt has reduced in 2023, from 64.6% in December of 2022 to reach 60% and so we continue our work in earnest. And on the Fitch Ratings, today Seychelles is rated 'BB with a Stable Outlook' which means that the false prophets are only sowing confusion; we are doing everything we can to make the economy grow.

And Mr Speaker I will show you again how some people say things but the information (they give) is false. In 2022 we received 332,068 visitors, tourists in our country, in 2023 we received 350,869, meaning an additional 18, 811 visitors which represents an increase of 6%. But what have we heard? We've heard people saying that tourism is doing poorly, tourists are not coming to Seychelles. And yet we have been able to get 350,000 which exceeded our projections by 6%. And, now Mr Speaker, I have once again heard that tourism is not doing well. But I will tell you Mr Speaker, the reality.

Mr Speaker, the reality is that as at 11 February 2024 there have been 40,422 visitors who have entered the country and when you compare this with (arrivals

as at) 11 February 2023 this represents an increase of 17%. Are tourists are not coming? With an increase of 17%, tourists are not coming and we are doing badly? But I would say that instead of making those declarations, let us find out how to encourage more tourists to come here.

And here I want to say that this year, there are negotiations ongoing and there will be more airlines which will operate direct flights to Seychelles, and so I want to give this encouragement.

And what have we also seen? We have seen Mr Speaker, that Waldorf Astoria, Hilton Hotels on Platte Island, a seven-star hotel, already opened. This year, Cheval Blanc, a seven-star hotel which will definitely not want a polluted marsh in its backyard will be opening, Avani will be opening opening, Canopy will be opening, Works are ongoing on Fregate Island Resort, all the work is proceeding for works to be launched at the Reef Hotel, Fisherman's Cove is about to undergo a complete renovation. And we continue to encourage them. The hotels on Assomption and Silhouette are in planification stages and so, Mr Speaker, with all that we are doing, is this not what is called development for our little country Seychelles?

If this is not called development, how should we call it? If this is not called us seeking ways to grow our economy, for us to put more in, to do more to improve the lives of our people, how should we call it? But Mr Speaker, we are an Administration that will continue to focus, an administration that will remain devoted, despite the fact that from time to time we receive discouragements, but for us, discouragement slides off, like water off a duck's back.

Mr Speaker, Yes, Education remains a challenge for us. It remains a challenge because we are exploring every way to give our youth that great start to life, but sometimes, that responsibility does not only lie with the school. Schools collect what comes from home, but if things are not fine at home, if at home we are not encouraging that youth, when he comes to school, he is not the model we would like him to be, on the contrary, he helps to destroy the other children. And so, once more I appeal to all the parents, like my good friend, Gramps Morgan said “If you do not care for the ladies, you will never care for the babies.” And so, when we are bringing the babies into this world, let us take care of the ladies but also let us make sure that these babies grow up to be children who are well taken care of, get the attention needed and who can deliver.

So Mr Speaker, at the same time we must continue encouraging our teachers because there is a lot of discouragement; and teachers too are human, so let us continue to encourage our teachers and through this encouragement, make school a better, more positive place and we will also have more Seychellois who on completion of their S5, want to enter the teaching profession.

And so let us do this because this year, we have discovered yet again that there are fewer children who are interested in taking up teaching. At the same time, as we get more of our own Seychellois teachers, we will have more children who apply themselves, and we will be able to create qualified Seychellois for our country, so we do not always have to look for foreigners to work here. However, we continue to simultaneously focus on the vocational programme. But we also want to put the emphasis on discipline and once again, I make an appeal to the community.

And here I want to say, when we see children fighting – and children will always fight – but when we see that children have entered into a conflict, I ask that we stop filming! Let us stop making videos, let us intervene to stop them, let us assume our responsibilities as adults. And sometimes in these videos, which are not at all pleasant, we see adults standing around and doing nothing. And so, adults, every time you spot any conflict, take that child as if he were your own child and prevent these fights.

And Mr Speaker, yes, we will maintain the programmes for the provision of breakfast and lunch to ensure that all our children have full stomachs, so that no one goes into class in the mornings with empty stomachs and unable to focus. We will also continue to bring the war against obesity into our schools; this will give the children more possibilities for sports and at the same time, we know they will be able to better concentrate.

And now Mr Speaker, I also want to speak of the number of scholarships that we have been able to give to our youth. In 2022 we awarded 209, in 2023 we awarded 229, and in 2023 we spent the sum of SCR192 million on our children who are studying overseas. And seeing the number of children being admitted to post-secondary institutions also gives some encouragement and we ask that this encouragement is also backed by the support from the community.

Health is also a challenge; we all know that Health is a challenge and it has been a challenge for many years. And today, we continue doing all we can to be able to fix it. But sometimes you would think that when you fix one part, the other part breaks, and when you give encouragement to one side, there are others who do other things.

And so, I want to say to the people of Seychelles, Yes, today, you can be assured that all of the Ministry of Health's workers – despite the insults that come their way, despite the discouraging comments – stand strong. And I stand with them, along with Minister Peggy Vidot. I stand on their side to say to the Ministry of Health's workers, 'We will continue to back you'. I want to say that we will continue to ensure that service is delivered and that the conditions themselves change.

And here I want to take advantage of this opportunity to say to the cleaners who were somewhat disturbed by the upheaval of this change, I want to say to you, 'Do not worry. This is an Administration that listens, we have heard what you had to say and yesterday in Cabinet, we discussed on your subject and this coming week, we are doing everything necessary for you to be remunerated in a more suitable manner. So, continue turning up to work and give the very best service possible.'

And precisely Mr Speaker, in relation to Health, we have already launched the project for the construction of the new Seychelles Hospital and earlier, in January, the technical delegation had the opportunity to visit some hospitals in Indonesia. And we are working on this plan and when the work on this plan is complete, we will present it to the National Assembly and the people of Seychelles so you can see what this hospital will be like.

And at the same time, I want to say thank you to the Fundraising Committee that has been established for the work they are doing. And here, I want once again to invite all Seychellois – this hospital will be our hospital, and so it would be great if you as MNAs, if the Seychellois people in general and the different organisations

were able to take it as your responsibility to engage in fundraising and then pass it on to this Committee so that we can collect funds for us to build this new hospital, especially as we are now in the year when the Seychelles Hospital celebrates its 100th anniversary this November. And it would be good if we could, in November, even if in a symbolic way, lay down the first foundation stone of this hospital which we are hoping will be able to serve us and the generations that will follow for the next 100 years.

Mr Speaker, of course when we speak of the economy, when we speak of business, we speak of Industry, and I was really happy when I was watching the news last night to see Mr Alvin Laurence of CEPS come on to speak on what they expected – and I have addressed several of their expectations. I am happy, I am pleased and this goes again along the line of freedom of expression – when in the years past would you have had a Chairman of CEPs tell the President what to include in his address?

Yes, the subject of ‘ease of doing business’ is one which we take to heart, and here I want to assure everybody that there is a lot of work being done and we are trying to change the culture that exists today. And this culture which we are trying to change is for us, through digitalization, to get people to be able to make their applications without having to stand in front of someone and where things will move faster. We want to remove the controls and become facilitators. And here we will soon have the Investment Portal as well as putting in place another project, the Government Accelerator Project and again, all this will help that the ease of doing business becomes a facility that is fit for purpose and helps our businessmen will be able to move forward.

And we have also seen, once again, after all these years that the reclamation exists, that it is only now that the roads in Zones 6, 19, and 20 have been surfaced with tarmac. More than 10 years! and it is left to us, as this Administration to do. And sometimes when people talk, you would think that we were the ones who didn't do (the job) during these past ten years, but no matter, we continue to do so.

On Ile Eve, we see that, finally, after all the talk, development is starting, and we now have the first batch of people who have already submitted their plans and there are also those whose construction have already begun.

The Regatta site, as we have already said, we will go tomorrow to see about these trees. We are ready to begin (development) and to give our visitors and our locals a new centre of attraction. With respect to The Waterfront Development, here once again, in Cabinet yesterday, we already took the decision that those who have been awarded can start their projects, so we will start seeing things happen at the Waterfront project before this year ends.

The allocation for Kato Nwar on Praslin has also all been made already. There are plans that have been submitted to the Planning Authority; we will see a new aspect as we go in to go on to the Baie Ste Anne Jetty, and this will become the commercial centre of Baie Ste Anne. And at Côte D'Or, there are again four plots of land which have been awarded to people through tender so they can develop them into tourism projects.

Mr Speaker, there is much work. And as I have said, there is a lot to do, but still work does not scare us. On the contrary, work galvanizes us with encouragement because when we came to present our programme for the 2020 elections to the

people of Seychelles, we told them we were coming to work, and this is exactly what we are doing.

And Mr Speaker, on the Agriculture front, we have been able to sort out the Animal Feed issue, and today it is a subject of the past, and I am happy to see how following the problem that arose and the government needed to intervene, how the various farmers, how so many of the farmers themselves took the initiative to resolve it. And this is one of the key words of our Administration: Take the initiative, Stand up, Get on with it, and we will give you the encouragement needed. So, we hope that all these issues will disappear and we will be able to move further ahead.

But, just with the gratuity etc. that applied for animal feed, has meant that Agriculture has been able to venture into other projects. For example, they have ventured into four new projects - On La Digue there will be the La Digue Farmers Market, there will be a market at Anse Boileau, we will be building another one at La Retraite and Bazar Victoria, the Sir Selwyn Selwyn Clarke Market, has also been able to undergo renovations. And we are also making all the plans to install the appropriate equipment in the Abattoir on Praslin and to build the new Abattoir at Providence soon. And in addition, we have been able to put some smaller infrastructure at the farmers' disposition.

So Mr Speaker, we also want to recognise that through this movement taking place, there is much greater interest by people in the private sector to enter the Agricultural sector.

And precisely as we speak of this, we must always be thinking of our Environment. Seychellois, we must keep our country clean. We must have an Environment in

which we all assume our responsibilities and today, I want to tell you that due to the fact that not everyone is taking their responsibilities and throwing rubbish everywhere, this is bringing an additional cost to LWMA and the other agencies because there is more waste in the environment which they need to collect.

From the very first address which I made here, I appealed to Seychellois that we keep our country clean, for us to ensure that cleanliness remains one of those qualities that our ancestors bequeathed us, and that in 2024, we once again make it one of our traditions.

Mr Speaker, we have much work to do with respect to the Environment, there are projects – for example, at Beau Vallon, where we have had to build a seawall that everyone today appreciates a lot. We have also had to build another seawall at Anse Gaulette, at Roche Corbizo, Amitié, where right now we are undertaking reinforcement works to stop the erosion. And already with just the little bit of work we've undertaken, not a grain of sand made its way on the road during all the high and spring tides that we've experienced, and we've been able to protect the road.

The project at Anse Marie Louise carries on, and we must of course also go to Anse La Blague, Pasquère. We need to go down to Au Cap. We look at all these places that today... on La Digue, Anse Sévère, Anse Source d'Argent, all of those are projects that we need to undertake.

And here, I must tell you not to forget that with climate change, our islands continue to be affected. And lately, we have received images of how our corals at Alphonse are being destroyed, the bleaching of corals is at an exceedingly high percentage and these are all things that will affect us.

Mr Speaker, Fisheries is one of the topics that is of utmost importance to us and we need to explore all the ways to consolidate our fisheries sector. And one of the things which this Administration has done is to look at how it can improve the services and facilities available to our fishermen. We have opened fishing ports, we have built stores, and this week in the district of Glacis, we have seen the Designated Minister, Minister Ferrari and Honourable Regina laying the first stone for a gear store. And I like the message that the Glacis Fishermen's Association sent to tell people "We are getting this facility, let us use it well". This is a positive message that we need to spread - and I know that on Praslin at Grand Anse, where they have received their gear store, they are getting on with it and all again means brings good facilities for our fishermen.

And there will be other things built. Anse Etoile has projects, at English River there is a project, at Anse à la Mouche there is a project, and this year, in the district of Anse aux Pins we will open the largest facility for fisheries in our country since this Administration has come in.

And at the same time we are exploring how and whether on Zone 14 we can widen the fish processing business, to turn into a fish processing zone where we will be able to engage in value addition and also have the facilities to repair industrial fishing vessels. Aquaculture development is another one of those things which we are moving forward with. But as we do this it is important for us to find ways to ensure that our fish stock is well preserved, as you have seen we have imposed size limits of 30 centimetres on Red Snapper and on Jobfish but we will need to go further. I know that there are important discussions ongoing with respect to protection of our stock of octopus, and all this, my friends, let's not see

them in a negative light. Let us see them as decisions which we are taking to ensure that tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, our children and our grandchildren will be able to know what a Red Snapper is, they will know what it is to eat Jobfish, they will know what it is to enjoy a delicious octopus curry, an octopus from Seychelles.

And also of course we are ensuring that we fight against illegal fishing. And here I wish to congratulate our Coast Guards because just in these last weeks, as I announced, we have been able to apprehend Malagassy, Sril Lankan as well as Comorian fishing boats – and I am happy to see that now there is better cooperation now and that things are really progressing. So, let us continue to protect this industry so that our stevedores and our Seychellois businesses can continue to prosper.

Mr Speaker, the 7th of December will remain graven in the history of our country Seychelles, because the 7th of December saw one of the biggest catastrophes that has ever occurred in our country, whether in the North with the environment, or in the East with the CCCL explosion. Since this administration has come into office, Seychelles has experienced two of its biggest disasters, COVID and 7 December. And Mr Speaker, I want to say that I stand before you with great pride, because through both disasters, this administration has shown that we can act and we can move to put our country back on the right path. We have been able with COVID to rebuild our battered economy, reopen the airport and move forward again; now with this other calamity, where there have been deaths, where there has been a lot of destruction, we have been able to come together.

And this Administration as I said at the beginning, is an Administration that does not look at your political colours, your religion, or the colour of your skin. When we come in to give assistance, we give aid to everyone, and when we give assistance, we don't look for cameras to take our photograph. Often, the bulk of the work that we do is done quietly, without anyone being aware, without being on television. And so today, I want to thank the Seychellois people for the solidarity that you again expressed on 7 December, just as you did during COVID.

There was an extraordinary spirit, and I simply felt myself gain strength by the way you acted, and may I ask that the same spirit continue to reign in our country Seychelles. People coming from every corner turned up to lend a hand and today, we continue to experience this solidarity.

And now, I want to say I am happy to see my brother, the Apostolic Nuncio, here listening to our address, to say to Monseigneur that I was really touched with the way that the (Cathedral of the) Immaculate Conception presented a crèche in solidarity with the victims from Cascade for Christmas - where they made a crèche which did not have a roof, a crèche that had glass shards in the manger where they had placed baby Jesus, and this again was another symbol of solidarity.

And here Mr Speaker, I want to say that all the families, as announced, all the families have been assisted with SCR25,000, and SCR25,000 for everyone from the disaster who got assisted, whether from the environment in the North or Cascade, has reached a total sum of SCR21,075,000 million. Everyone has received it and I was really shocked when following a debate where people brought certain points to my attention, a debate that said that government should not have come in to

help people. But no! We are a government that comes to assist all Seychellois who are in need. And we will continue to do it.

And Mr Speaker all the homeowners have already been contacted, work continues, and today we see that things are going back to normal.

But Mr Speaker I also want to say to the Seychellois people and sometimes, when I watch these programmes...

Mr Speaker, On the 7th of February it had been two months (since the disaster) and in two months, PMC has repaired 175 houses, in two months more than 50% of the houses have been repaired. Mr Speaker, I did not expect that in two months we would have completed repairing 100% of the houses. But there are certain people, who would have - I don't know what kind of expectation; and yet, when the cyclone Felleng hit in the region of Anse aux Pins goodness know how many years ago, till today there are certain people who are still waiting for this assistance to come through. And we, in two months, we have touched everyone.

And here, Honourable Monthy, Honourable Arrisol, Honourable Hoareau, Honourable Regina, I want to say to you, "Congratulations!" and I really appreciate how you have demonstrated how a Member of the National Assembly goes down to the level of their citizen, they go to help their citizen.

And I also take this opportunity to thank all the agencies – during these disasters I have seen the people, whether they are from Local Government, and here if I start to name names, I risk forgetting some, so I prefer to stop here... all the people from the different agencies, I have seen how they gave their all and so I want to say to you, Carry on! because this is the positive spirit that our country Seychelles needs.

And Mr Speaker, right now, there are the insurance companies who have of course started to make payments. They have already paid out SCR5.8 million to businesses. And amongst the businesses, there are 80% who have already restarted their operations and there are a little more than 100 who have not yet started operating because of the condition of their buildings. I also want to say that the investigation continues, I obtained the information before I came here. The investigation continues and there will be certain announcements or certain things which will be done soon. And all the victims are being given the necessary assistance.

And so Mr Speaker, as I go towards my conclusion, I want to tell the Seychellois people, People of Seychelles, this little nation of Seychelles, during the last three years, we have become a pride in itself. We have become a country where, on the international scene, when you name the Seychelles, everybody listens. When you name Seychelles, all the different nations wish to associate themselves with Seychelles. We are champions in various fields, and as you know where Governance, where Democracy is concerned as well, Seychelles is way up there. If we are not the first on an Index, we are second.

And where it concerns Corruption, although sometimes you would think that the media is a bit wary of announcing it, yes, we are first in Africa with 70 points. The African country that came second only has 56 points, and Seychelles is ranked on the same level as France, with Austria, with the United Kingdom; we rank higher than the USA and many other countries.

We continue to have a passport that the more we negotiate, the more will be able to enter other countries without a visa.

Mr Speaker, as a small island state we are the champions for other small island states, and it is for this reason that it is Seychelles that is the Chair of all the small islands of the African Union. And so even if we are small, we are a leader in the world and our various government officials are invited to participate in international conferences.

And so, I want to say to you to continue to raise Seychelles higher, let us continue to have pride for our country.

And today Mr, Speaker, I want to thank all Seychellois for their support, for accompanying us, for their contribution. I want to thank all our international and local partners. And I want once again to make this appeal that we remain united, that we work hard, that we continue to walk the path of national reconciliation, let us go and take a new step to take leave populist politics. Let us take leave of politics based on personal attacks. Let us as a people become more responsible. Let us speak the truth, and as the Scriptures say, the truth when we speak it, will set us free. Let us engage in politics that is constructive, and mature. Let us encourage our youth by the example that we set right here in this National Assembly and out of it, so that our youth will see themselves as leaders, and of course throughout all this, let us vouchsafe the future of our country Seychelles which of course our heart beats for.

And as a responsible leader, I want to say to the People of Seychelles, I will continue to serve my country with all my ability. I will continue to put all my devotion to serve Seychellois and our country Seychelles. I will continue to bring our country towards a responsible governance and it is for this reason that I say, let the year 2024 become a year of action. And I say to all Seychellois, and I say to

the National Assembly, make it become a year of positivity. Throw negativity by the wayside, and let us bind ourselves to what is positive. Let us not allow ourselves to be distracted. Let us ignore all noise, all distractions and let us focus on work. As we say, 'Forget the noise, focus on the work'.

I ask that Almighty God bless our beautiful country Seychelles, bless all Seychellois, bless all visitors who choose Seychelles as the place to work or to spend their holidays.

And Mr Speaker, as I have always said, *nou pa pou zanmen les tonbe*.

Thank you very much.

