

GOVERNMENT OF SEYCHELLES

**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND
MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT**

SPEECH

By

MR WILLIAM E. HERMINIE

**MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND
MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT**

**ICPD +5 : THE HAGUE FORUM
8TH TO 12TH FEBRUARY 1999**

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Mr President
Heads and Members of Delegations
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and privilege as leader of the delegation from the Republic of Seychelles to today address this important gathering. May I also take this opportunity to thank the government and people of the Netherlands for the hospitality extended to my delegation.

Mr President, five years ago, in Cairo, Egypt, the largest intergovernmental Conference on population and development ever held, brought together more than 180 states. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) must be applauded for the pioneering work it set in motion in 1994 to address one of the most crucial challenges facing our global society- the challenge of how to sustain our future.

It was with great acclamation that Seychelles joined other countries in adopting the ICPD-Programme of Action, which focussed on meeting the needs of individual women and men, rather than on achieving demographic targets. We supported the Programme because it aimed at providing practical solutions to a number of problematic issues. Issues like the rapid growth in human numbers, the depletion of basic resources, environmental pollution, 'widespread and persistent poverty and wasteful consumption. Issues that if not addressed and allowed to develop, will affect the future generations and the future of our planet. That, **Mr President**, is why, Seychelles lent its whole hearted support to the Cairo programme of action.

It is with great pride that I share with you today, our experience regarding the implementation of the ICPD objectives. Let me state that the government of Seychelles saw it as an obligation, given the importance it attaches to human development, to implement the ICPD recommendations.

It was no surprise then, that Seychelles was the first country in the Indian Ocean region to take the initiative in 1995 through a workshop to discuss the ICPD implementation at the country level. The workshop had a sole objective- of producing the Seychelles strategies in population and development in the context of the ICPD.

Five years down the line, ^{read} **the obvious question is what have we achieved in the Seychelles regarding the implementation of the ICPD objectives?**

As many of you may be aware, Seychelles is distinct from the majority of developing countries in terms of level of development. The basic requirements of health, hygiene, education, access to family planning and reproductive health services have largely been met. The principle of gender equality is enshrined at all levels and is manifested in the Constitution and in employment and educational laws. Men and women have equal rights and opportunities to participate in the country's development. Harmful practices or discrimination against women and girls do not exist in Seychelles.

Mr President, I am proud to say that a solid foundation has been laid in our country. Today, the infant mortality rate is 8.1 per 1000. That is comparable to the rate in New Zealand and many European countries. With a life expectancy of 70 years and 85% of our population literate, we indeed have reasons to be proud of what we have achieved.

However, Mr President, in no way can we say we have done enough nor can we afford to be complacent. We still need to do more to ensure sustainability in improving the quality of life of our people.

Speaking from the perspective of a small island state, I would single out the lack of qualified personnel to do research in the field of population and development as the major constraint regarding the implementation of the ICPD objectives. It is imperative that the nature and significance of the links between population and development, especially from a small island developing state perspective, is closely studied in order to guide policies.

With an ageing population, an economy that is heavily dependent on tourism and a highly vulnerable ecosystem, Seychelles must be prepared to arm itself so that we can sustain what we have achieved.

In the words of our head of state, **“the future of Seychelles and the Seychellois people depend on the fine balance between development and the fragile environment.”**

It is with this principle in mind that we have introduced the Gold Card concept. Referred to as the **“world’s first ever environmental tourism visa”**, the Gold Card strategy is an evolution of the Seychellois people’s mission to preserve an important part of the planet through a sustainable tourism strategy for the enjoyment of future generations. It is a means of inviting those who visit our islands to contribute towards protecting and preserving the natural environment and sharing with the Seychellois the responsibility of protecting some of the world’s most beautiful islands.

Card

Let me stress, Mr President, that the Gold Strategy is aimed at promoting Seychelles as an environmental concern as opposed to a tourist destination. In effect, the whole country becomes a nature reserve belonging to all mankind. As for the people of Seychelles, we are proud to be the appointed custodians of this nature reserve.

I cannot emphasise enough ‘our commitment to preserving our environment. It is an issue close to the hearts of every Seychellois. Like it was once said, Mr president **“ It is our task in our time and in our generation to hand down undiminished to those who come after us, as was handed down to us by those who went before, the natural wealth and beauty which is ours.”** (J.F. Kennedy)

Mr President, five years ago, we committed ourselves to pursuing noble objectives that will leave a safe heritage for our children. Today, through new reforms and innovation in our education and health systems, strategies to better protect our environment and a stronger partnership with the non-governmental sector, the Government of Seychelles is continuing with what it started because we feel it is our duty to do so. It is the least we can do for our people.

* **Mr President**, on behalf of the people of Seychelles, I would like finally to thank the UNFPA for its continued support to the Seychelles population programme. Without its help, Seychelles would not have arrived at where it is today.

Thank you.