

**Opening remarks for the farewell dinner for the outgoing Chief Justice Egonda-Ntende, delivered on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2014 during the Dinner at Savoy Hotel, Beau Vallon, Mahé, by His Lordship Justice Durai Karunakaran, the Acting Chief Justice.**

His Lordship, the outgoing Chief Justice FMS Egonda-Ntende; Madam Egonda-Ntende; His Lordship Justice Macgregor, the President of the Court of Appeal; the Justices of Appeal; my dear colleagues, the Judges of the Supreme Court; Honourable Attorney General; Your Worships, the Magistrates; Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen! All protocols observed. Good Evening to one and all!

Our emotions are always the most honest and more revealing of our heart when we say “Good Bye” while parting, than when we say “Hello” while meeting. Frankly speaking, “Good-Byes” and bidding farewell always carry a twinge of sadness. A quarter of a century ago, we gave a farewell dinner to the then Chief Justice Dr. E.E. Seaton. He was parting after 10 years of service with the Seychelles Judiciary as Chief Justice. He was a great Chief Justice too. He was my mentor; a towering personality; intellectually and physically too. I loved him for many reasons. At his farewell party, I personally expressed my sadness over his departure; almost I was on the verge of tears. He did not recognize my sadness. In his farewell speech, he retorted with humility. His words of wisdom are still echoing in my ears. He said “Nothing to be sad about over my departure; men may come and men may go, but the Institution and the Office of the Chief Justice will go on forever”. I thought perhaps, he said that to console those of us, who were sad. But there is truth in what he said. However, in hindsight I now realise, that he formulated simply the Rule but with due respect, it seems to me, he omitted to stipulate maybe out of humility, the exception to the rule. Because, I find that some men do come, but they never go. They live. They continue to live forever. They continue to live forever in the legacy they have left behind, a legacy that lives forever with the Institution. One among such men is the departing Chief Justice FMS

Egonda-Ntende. The story of that legacy is what I would like to share with you now.

His Lordship the Chief Justice FMS Egonda-Ntende took up his appointment as the Chief Justice of Seychelles and joined us in August 2009, with a track-record of a distinguished career and impressive credentials in the reform and modernisation of judicial systems. In addition to his judicial service at home in Uganda, where he had established and headed the Commercial Court and chaired the Law Reporting Committee, His Lordship had been involved in establishing an independent judiciary in East Timor – where he served as a judge of the Court of Appeal – and in the United Nations Mission in Kosovo.

However, of all those assignments he had undertaken and accomplished, I believe, the most significant and remarkable one is what he undertook and accomplished in Seychelles. No doubt, we, the people of Seychelles, particularly, the members of the legal and judicial community owe him a great debt of gratitude.

I have been serving the Judiciary of Seychelles, having been sentenced to a life of judicial service, acting in various capacities for more than three decades. I have experienced almost every aspect of Court life and administration. Drawing upon all this experience, I consider myself competent to say that the last five years have been the most significant, positive, and progressive in the history of our Judiciary. The era of His Lordship Chief Justice Egonda-Ntende, has made an unprecedented impact on the evolution of the Judiciary. He has worked tirelessly, compassionately and bravely in order to transform the Judiciary from a state of stagnancy to vibrancy and growth. He has not only led by example but has, when necessary, borne the lion's share of the practical burden of much-needed reform and development work. He has done so humbly and patiently, in the face of daunting obstacles, and in the best traditions of service to the public and the legal profession. It is no exaggeration to say that we have witnessed a sea-change during his

tenure and this has greatly enhanced, not only our own working environment, but also has enhanced the level of public confidence in our justice delivery system. After all, Justice is rooted in public confidence.

Many of the changes we have seen in the last five years have taken place before our own eyes – the most obvious being the completion and inauguration of our prestigious and bright new Palais de Justice in 2013, and the recruitment of a greatly increased complement of Judges and support staff to do justice to its modern facilities.

Many more changes have been directed to opening up the operations of the Judiciary to all stakeholders and the public, in pursuit of the time-honoured truth that “sunlight is the best disinfectant”. Transparency is the foundation of accountability, and as His Lordship the Chief Justice has emphasised time and time again, the accountability through transparency should be no threat to the operation of a truly independent Judiciary. In fact, it is essential to the advancement of Democracy, Good governance and Rule of Law. Adopting an inaugural Strategic Plan, introducing Codes of Conduct for the Bench and the Bar, and time standards for Supreme Court proceedings, developing regular stakeholder interaction and educational initiatives, substantial legal aid reforms, publication of the first Annual Report of the Judiciary, and of course the online publication of essential resources through the website of the Seychelles Legal Information Institute or SeyLII – these are all the milestones laid down by Chief Justice Egonda-Ntende, a manifestation of his principled and unwavering commitment to modernization, transparency, access to justice, and justice for all. Ladies and Gentlemen of the legal world, *Res ipsa loquitur!*

As significant as all these changes are, however, the most significant of all have taken place behind the scenes, in the internal architecture which supports our day-to-day work as judicial officers. None of us can overlook and fail to appreciate the impact of the new digital case management system (CCASS), which the Chief Justice was able to obtain from his home

country Uganda. It is no overstatement to say that CCASS has already revolutionised the judicial and administrative work at Palais De Justice. It has certainly revolutionised our understanding of our own workloads, and the expectations legitimately placed upon us as judicial officers. The introduction of FTR digital recordings in our superior courts has had a similar revolutionary impact in the courtrooms and beyond. In every aspect of his endeavours, the Chief Justice has attempted to foster a working culture which understands the imperatives of progress and modernisation, which embraces technology and is constantly alert for opportunities to put new technologies to good use. I for one sincerely hope that this culture survives and flourishes and meets the changing and challenging needs of time and society.

I believe that these five years of Justice Egonda-Ntende's era have been very significant and an inspirational one. The Chief Justice has demonstrated that we have the capacity to change, and that our work here has the potential to attract both local and international acclaim. We now owe it to ourselves, and to His Lordship, to keep up the momentum he has set in motion.

Your Lordship, on behalf of the members of the entire Judiciary of Seychelles, the administration and support staff of the Judiciary, members of the legal profession, and the people of this great Nation, we sincerely thank you. Your efforts on our behalf have already borne rich fruits. We shall do our utmost to ensure that the harvest continues. We congratulate you on your appointment to the Court of Appeal in Uganda, and we wish you the very best in that prestigious role, and success in all walks of life. May God bless you and your family with peace, prosperity, good health and happiness! Thank you all.