



JUDICIARY OF SEYCHELLES

SPEECH OF THE CHIEF JUSTICE DR. MATHILDA TWOMEY ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCHING OF THE JUDICIARY'S STRATEGIC PLAN: VISION 2020

7th February, 2017

Welcome today to the launch of our Vision 2020 – a strategic plan that the Judiciary is adopting to take it forward from now until the year 2020. As I promised in my speech at the Opening of the Supreme Court last month, this will be a busy year committed to promoting Unity in our Diversity. I can think of nothing more appropriate than to start by setting our sails straight out to sea with a four year commitment to strengthening the Judiciary.

It is so easy to find yourself in a good position and not want to change for fear of destabilising and perhaps never regaining your same status. And we are in a good position. We have a full complement of Judges and Magistrates – the highest number the Judiciary has had – and a committed support team. Our capacity at the moment is high and our backlog of cases is depleting. The Supreme Court, Employment Tribunal and Court of Appeal enjoy beautiful, well-equipped facilities, and our Magistrates' Court and other Tribunals are housed in serviced offices without the former threat of the roof caving in on them. We have refined our court processes and are committed to a slow adoption of technological improvements, such as the upgrading of our case management system and the introduction of videolink hearings. Even our public image is improved from a few years' past.

However, the varied and persistent demands on the Office of the Chief Justice remind me that without a clear plan, a commitment which delineates our resource priorities and focuses our collective mind, we could be pulled in many directions. We cannot afford to remain stagnant or directionless or we might, through inadvertence, lose the gains we have won.

This is the second strategic plan that the Judiciary has launched and follows on the shoulders of its predecessor which ran from 2010 to 2014.

The previous strategic plan introduced much change in the Judiciary and when we look around today, you can see how much we benefited under it. We have these beautiful new premises in the form of the Palais de Justice and Annex, with purpose-built facilities. The backlog of the Court became a key phrase bandied about and Judges found themselves under the spotlight. A case management system was put in place to modernize the judiciary and also to enable detailed scrutiny of case progress. We introduced committees to monitor operations and processes, engaged with local and international partners, and spent long hours implementing the minute details of the changes that we hoped to see. When Former Chief Justice Egonda-Ntende's term as Chief Justice ended we were significantly on the way to the goals that had been set out in the

aspirational Strategic Plan. We are grateful for his gift at harnessing resources, his attention to detail and his stubborn ability to steer the course straight ahead.

Thereafter, we had a period of flux, and after I was appointed it took me some time to find my feet as the navigator of this complex Judiciary. For that time it was as if we stopped travelling towards a goal, and casually drifted along, despite having only just set out on our voyage. However, what this time of drifting has enabled us to do is to have the benefit of seeing what changes were lasting and which have sprung leaks and need reinforcing.

I wanted this process of setting the strategic plan to be fully inclusive and we invited each of the courts and each administrative division to consult its members and answer several questions posed in a questionnaire. We received great input across the board and were delighted with the raw honesty of the replies received.

Then followed a long process of introspection. We had asked questions about the real core of the Judiciary and were confronted by the honest answers written by the staff members. We found there the weaknesses in our present state. The struggles and threats to our various divisions. But we also found there the aspirations of each division. Each report reflected a longing to excel, to improve and to achieve. Each discussion we had similarly had an undertone of quiet anticipation, not abject acceptance of the status quo. This encouraged me that the team are as committed as I am to the improvement of the Judiciary.

And from that introspection we come to this short document which summarises our navigation strategy for the next four years. We have distilled down the essential matters to ensure that we have achievable outcomes for the 4-year period.

We decided from the start not to move too far from the structure of the first strategic plan for the purposes of continuity and seeing the unachieved come to pass. We kept the same eight headings as were previously used (these will be explained in detail by Ms. Barnes shortly) and have adopted many of the outcomes which were unachieved under that plan, albeit tempered by our present situation and priorities.

As I launch this aspirational plan, I am acutely aware that it requires resources for its mobilisation and success. I am also aware that currently we are under a budget restriction and that even the printing of this document came from money that we do not have easy access to. This will clearly be a problem to our development of the plan, and I hope that we can work with the Assembly and the Ministries for Finance and for Legal Affairs to address the very real resource constraints that we face. However, at the same time, the Judiciary is a separate branch of state and must fiercely guard its independence. Our institution requires resources to ensure that Seychelles has an independent, impartial and excellent centre for dispute resolution, this is our constitutional mandate and we are committed to achieving it.

You will see that an important part of our plan is the engagement with relevant stakeholders and partners. The Bar association, the ministries, government agencies, the diplomatic corps and the civil society – we want to build partnerships that can encourage real development and change in Seychelles. I call on you all to support us in achieving the goals of our plan and to hold us to account if we stray from our course.

And with that said, I am going to invite my ELA, Ms. Joelle Barnes to brief you on the details of the Vision 2020 and how we will achieve it. Thereafter, we will have some refreshments and then get back to work. We have much to do. Thank you.

