



**The Republic of Seychelles**

**COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF  
ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION  
AGAINST WOMEN**

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Geneva

**STATEMENT**

**By**

**The Republic of Seychelles**

**Delivered by Mr Vincent Meriton,**

**Designated Minister and**

**Minister of Social Affairs, Community**

**Development and Sports**

Madame Chair Nicole Améline,  
Members of the Committee,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to appear before you here today to defend Seychelles first state party report on CEDAW. I wish to acknowledge the Chair of the Committee, Mrs Nicole Améline, the members of the committee and the rapporteur for Seychelles, Ms Pramila Patten.

As a Small Island Developing State, Seychelles has overcome many obstacles to reach this significant milestone in regards to the implementation of the Convention. Seychelles acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women without any reservation in 1992. We also signed its Optional Protocol in 2002 and ratified it in 2011. Seychelles has also signed and ratified other major international treaties on human rights including their Optional Protocols, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and more recently the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its optional protocol.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere apologies for the delay in submitting our first report to the CEDAW Committee. My delegation recognises the reporting exercises as important and vital mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. We look forward to today's open dialogue. Unfortunately like many SIDS, we have struggled with meeting the heavy reporting obligations, which has contributed to our late submission of more than 18 years. The delay in our reporting is a result of our limited human capacity and resources. The submission of Seychelles Combined Initial to Fifth report, and the presence of our delegation here today, is a testament of our commitment towards the implementation of the Convention.

Before I continue, I am pleased to introduce to the Committee the Seychelles delegation; comprising of Mrs Linda William-Melanie, the Principal Secretary for Social Affairs; Mrs Marie-Josée Bonne, Special Adviser for Social Affairs, and Mrs Tessa Siu-Robert from the Ministry's Gender Secretariat and Mr Vipin Mathew Benjamin from the office of the Attorney General. I am Vincent Meriton, the Minister for Social Affairs, Community Development and Sports, with portfolio responsibility for Gender. I also wish to acknowledge the presence of our NGO delegation, firstly the Chair of the Liaison Unit for Non Government Organisations in Seychelles (LUNGOS), Mrs Marie-Nella Azemia and the chair of the Gender Commission, Mrs Monica Servina – Ladies and Gentlemen, our government strongly advocates for the active participation of civil society in all realms of society's development.

Madame Chair,

Seychelles may be one of the smallest nations on earth, with a resident population of less than 90,000, but we are a nation of strong women and men who continue to prove their strength in today's harsh realities. Our culture, geography, religion and colonial history have moulded our concepts of gender and the way they are manifested on a daily basis. Seychelles is categorised as having a very high level of human development, ranking 46 in the 2013 Human Development Report, enjoying a decent standard of living and are considered as a high middle income country. We are on target to achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals, and considered to be one of the leading countries in Africa in regards to gender equality and the advancement of women.

We are also party to various regional human rights instruments including: the Protocol to the "African Charter on Human & People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa" (in 2006) and have signed the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development (in 2008) and submitted the ratification instrument in 2011. The latter Protocol is aligned to the main human rights treaties aimed at promoting gender equality and advancing women's rights, including of course CEDAW. I am happy to inform the Committee that Seychelles has once again topped the barometer for the whole region. The SADC Gender & Development Index (SGDI) for 2013 reveals that we have achieved 82% of the targets set out in the Protocol, a three percentage point increase from 2012.

Despite our big achievements for our small size, we suffer from many of the same challenges as other countries. Our status as a high middle income country and lack of abject poverty has impacted on our ability to secure support from donors and proved to be another challenge we have had to endure. Our history of putting people at the centre of development and our heavy and sustained investment in the social sector has left us one of the most highly indebted countries in the world.

Our Government realises that there is no room for complacency and that there is still a long road for us to travel, and is therefore committed to the promotion of gender equality by addressing the following current national gender priorities.

**Firstly, Gender Based Violence (GBV)** remains one of the most common and pervasive forms of discrimination against women and girls in our society. GBV is a daily reality for far too many women and girls and the number of cases reported continues to increase. The Seychelles government has adopted a policy and strategy with the highest level of political commitment, and a working group has been put in place to monitor the implementation of actions of our action plan. With support from the European Union, we have developed a proposed Domestic Violence Bill which proposes to criminalise domestic violence. The Bill focuses on domestic violence and is not limited only to violence against women and girls but also provides protection to male victims of domestic violence.

As part of the consultation process, a stakeholder consultation workshop was held in August 2013. My Ministry will also be holding district level forums in order to engage the community in the drafting process.

The Committee rightly highlighted the serious concern in regards to the long delays in the justice system. In light of several challenges and limitations, especially to limited current capacity of the courts and associated costs for the complainant, it has been proposed that the existing fast track system provided by the Family Tribunal stay in place for the provision of protection from domestic violence in civil cases, to ensure speedy response and access to free services. Criminal cases as specified under the Domestic Violence Bill and Penal Code will be dealt with by the Magistrate and Supreme Courts.

The Government recognises the need for the following actions:

- including the provision of a full-time Magistrate at the Family Tribunal as a short-term solution and restructuring of the Tribunal to the judiciary as a long-term solution;
- development of sentencing guidelines for judges dealing with domestic violence cases;
- improved access to legal aid;
- establishment of more GBV procedures for service providers and review of the GBV Working Together Manual;
- provision of institutionalised training on GBV for key service providers including the Police;
- establishment of a one stop centre for GBV and shelter for GBV survivors;
- rehabilitation of GBV perpetrators; and
- rehabilitation for sex workers and trafficked persons.

Seychelles has been seeking assistance from various donor organisations for technical assistance and support, to help us see our plans become a reality. After lobbying at the highest political level, I am happy to announce that the UNODC has committed itself to assist Seychelles through the Plan of Action (2014-2016) on Promoting the Rule of Law and Human Security in Seychelles. The Plan of Action outlines several areas including Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV).

The UNODC has made a commitment towards assisting Seychelles to secure funds to establish a One Stop Centre for survivors of SGBV, as well as establish a pilot perpetrator programme to reduce the level of repeated crime and ensure safety of SGBV survivors. The Plan of Action also outlines further SGBV related outputs, including the enhancement of institutional capacities of Police, Prosecutors and Judiciary to detect, investigate, prosecute, consider and adjudicate SGBV cases; the development of Standard Operating Procedures for investigation of SGBV cases, including forensic

examination; and the improvement of existing case management and monitoring for SGBV cases.

On the issue of training, I am pleased to report that during June and August of 2013, the Gender Secretariat with support from the European Union, conducted two more gender training workshops for police officers focusing on GBV. Training of the judiciary was identified as a need by the Committee, and as stated in our response, we have held a sensitisation session with the judiciary, and in the same project also provided gender training to police and lawyers, produced a Gender and Law manual, and conducted a training workshop on gender campaign packaging and activism.

The Government recognises the need to conduct continuous awareness campaigns to challenge negative social norms, beliefs and cultures that perpetuate and condone GBV. In 2009 Seychelles joined UNIFEM's global "Say No to Violence Campaign". In 2010, Seychelles rolled out the UN Secretary General's international campaign "UNiTE for Peace to End Violence Against Women", as well as the regional campaign "Africa UNiTE to End Violence Against Women and Girls". In Seychelles we have also launched our own national campaign "UNiTE for Peace to End Gender Based Violence" in the same year and launched the Orange Day campaign last year. In 2013 we have produced orange day t-shirts for all the staff of the Social Affairs Department and for all sports women and men ambassadors. We have also produced over 4,500 leaflets in English and Creole on GBV and sexual harassment. As part of activities for the commemoration of 16 Days of Activism for this year, Seychelles plans to join the UN Women's global "COMMIT campaign to End Violence Against Women".

**Trafficking of women and girls** is another form of Gender Based Violence which the Seychelles Government has prioritised. I am happy to announce that the work on guidelines on the proposed Trafficking in Persons Bill and the National Strategy has been completed with technical assistance and support from the UNODC. The draft Bill and National Strategy is in the final processes of validation, before being sent to Cabinet for approval.

Following resource mobilisation efforts, it pleases me to report that Seychelles has secured further commitment from the UNODC to support public awareness raising efforts on transnational organised crime, especially Trafficking in Persons; strengthen police training on Trafficking in Persons; and improve data collection, reporting mechanism and best practices on Trafficking in Persons.

In addition to the proposal of strengthened laws on domestic violence, work is continuing to review the Civil Code to ensure that **gender discriminatory legal provisions** are withdrawn wherever they exist.

The **second** main gender concern is the promotion of **gender parity and equality in decision making**. With the support of the Indian Ocean Commission, a local chapter of the “Femmes en politiques de l’Ocean Indien” was introduced in October 2012. This body is a non-partisan association whose membership consists mostly of women leaders in all sectors of society, but especially proponents wishing to mentor and shape the young female leaders of the future. It is still in its infancy but it is hoped that it will encourage more young women to the political and decision making arena.

For some years now, and most notably since the drafting of the state party report for CEDAW, Seychelles has witnessed the nomination of more women into senior leadership roles in government and the parastatal sectors. Today Seychelles has made leaps and bounds towards achieving gender parity at decision making levels, and the President of the Republic has and continues to make efforts to nominate more women into high level leadership posts such as Principal Secretary, Judge, Chief Executive Officer, and District Administrator.

As reported in our response, I am proud to highlight again that since the national parliamentary elections in 2011 Seychelles global ranking has the 5<sup>th</sup> highest proportion of women in national parliament, surpassed only by Rwanda, Andorra, Cuba and Sweden.

Since our initial report was submitted, Seychelles has witnessed the nomination of our first female Judge of the Court of Appeal, first female Judge of the Supreme Court, first female Governor of Central Bank, first female Secretary General of the Executive Office of the President, first female chair of the Seychelles Savings Bank, first female chair of the Seychelles Trading Company, and the first female chair of the civil society umbrella organisation LUNGOS. I am also proud to highlight the achievement of the former chair of the Seychelles Tourism Board, who has recently been appointed as the new female UNWTO Director for Africa.

I am pleased to inform the Committee that since our last communication in May of this year, the proportion of women holding the posts of CEO have increased from 36% to 44%. Women holding the post of Principal Secretary has increased from 44% to 45%. At District Administrators level women’s representation has increased from 67% to 70%. However, women represent only 14% of national board chair persons and continue to be under represented in senior levels within the private sector. Statistics from the Small Enterprises Agency (SENPA) show that female registration rates are well over 70%.

Madame Chair,

**Thirdly, Teenage pregnancy** remains another issue of concern of our government as well as the Committee. Adolescent reproductive health rights, particularly the issue of access, have been a continued concern and gap for our country for many years. As

announced in our response, my ministry is proposing that the laws on age of access to medical treatment (incl. reproductive health services and HIV and AIDS testing) are harmonised to the age of consent to sex which we have proposed to be 16 years. It is the goal of the Government to ensure that women and girls be empowered to choose whether they are ready and want to enter into a relationship, the number and spacing of their children and build a future where every pregnancy is wanted.

The **fourth** area we cannot fail but address is that of the **Economic empowerment of women** which has been recognised as a national economic necessity and a lever of change for improving the status of women, children and the community. Like many SIDS, Seychelles suffers from a serious lack of human resources to meet our labour market needs. We have had very low levels of unemployment, even during the most difficult times since the global financial and economic crisis and the macro-economic reform programme implemented since 2008. With the continued increase in the cost of living, government has strived to steadily improve the income of public servants who are predominantly female. New schemes of service have been introduced for many posts which are dominated by women: These include cadres for administrators, office assistant, teachers, social services, counsellors, accounting, and legal secretaries and research officers. Further schemes of service reviews are expected to be completed for nurses and psychologists. This will contribute significantly towards retaining skilled human resources in these areas and reducing poverty amongst women in particular and improving access to decent work.

The International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Decent Work Country Programme for the period 2011-2015 also outlines several gender responsive objectives. The main achievements of the programme have been the review of the Employment Act and National Employment Policy and the development of a HIV and AIDS Work Place Policy.

As detailed in Seychelles response, the revised Employment Act introduces a clear definition of sexual harassment, which is in line with international standards.

I am pleased to inform the Committee that, in August of this year, the President of the Republic announced the establishment of a new department for Enterprise Development and Business Innovation, which is headed by a female Principal Secretary, and housed under the Office of the President. The new department aims to strengthen coordination amongst the various agencies dealing with business and provide increased support to small businesses in particular. This will be a significant win for women, as the majority of small businesses and cottage industries are owned by women. Provision exists under the Small Business Financing Agency (SBFA) to provide women with access to seed money for such entities – this is headed by a woman.

Government is also supporting civil society under the economic reform programme to build marketable skills amongst women and girls. Government has awarded grants to members of the NGO umbrella organisation, LUNGOS, from the general funds of the European Union to support small projects with these aims.

The Committee has questioned the progress made towards supporting working mothers and increasing access to child care services. As provided in our response and in the initial report, children aged three and a half years old have access to free crèches provided by the Government, with almost universal uptake. Gaps remain in regards to children aged three months to three and a half years.

Private employers offering day care facilities, whilst still rare, do exist. One of the large hotels has provided private day care facilities for its staff since 2006. I am pleased to inform the committee that the recently established Institute of Early Childhood Care and Development has received approval from Cabinet to be the regulator for Child Minding.

Madame Chair,

The **Fifth** area I wish to focus on is **Gender mainstreaming**, which remains a priority for the Government. The portfolio for gender was established since 1992 and it is currently held by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Community Development and Sports. As already reported in our response, we have begun to draft Seychelles first National Gender Policy and National Gender Plan of Action. Both the Policy and the Plan of Action which have been drafted to closely align with CEDAW as well as the SADC Protocol, aim to address many of the key concerns I have mentioned. The Committee was concerned with the resources provided to the national gender machinery. As reported in our response, the Gender Secretariat, housed within my ministry, received an additional member of staff to make three Officers and a significant budget increase for 2013.

The national gender machinery, including national committees such as the National Gender Management Team (NGMT) are currently under review. Our aim is to revise their composition to ensure a high level of seniority and commitment. We are requesting that line ministries officially recognise committee members as gender focal persons. We will also continue to lobby for the establishment of sector level gender committees, for the implementation of the draft National Gender Policy and Plan of Action.

Government is committed towards the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of women and girls, as well as the support of at risk groups of men and boys in our country, as part of the solution to many of our continued development challenges. The Government is conscious of the rising cost of living, the influx of illicit drugs into our small islands and the devastating results this has had on our men and women and related rise in crime.



Towards this end, in 2011 my Ministry developed a National Plan of Action and is leading a Social Renaissance Initiative. The aim of this initiative is to specifically address the increasing plethora of social ills, which is being fuelled by illicit drug trafficking and abuse problems. Many of the social ills tackled by the initiative, including illicit drug abuse and trafficking, prostitution, theft and petty crimes, have gender dimensions in regards to their cause and effect.

Specific programmes and interventions have been introduced, albeit with limited resources, to provide the necessary rehabilitation and psycho-social services to our young men and women being affected. For example, a Wellness Centre was opened earlier this year to provide a Methadone replacement programme coupled with life-skills support related to employment, educational and spiritual opportunities to support the rehabilitation of patients. Furthermore, the Government has pledged support for the introduction of a night service specifically for Commercial Sex Workers.

The **sixth** major focus area which the Committee rightly highlighted is the priority of strengthening sex-disaggregated data and the Government recognises the need to strengthen **gender statistics** which continuously pose great difficulties during internal monitoring and evaluation of the status of gender issues and when reporting on the various gender related treaties Seychelles is a party to. I am pleased to state that the National Bureau of Statistics has published a second Crime Justice and Security Bulletin in June 2013. We plan to continue strengthening this publication and build capacity through further training. Seychelles is also seeking assistance from the UNODC to improve case management and monitoring of GBV and sexual assault cases.

Madame Chair,

In conclusion, it is my vision for every young girl growing up in Seychelles to enjoy their Constitutional rights and freedoms without discrimination. It is my sincere hope that the future of our island home, is built on a nation of empowered citizens where our girls and women have the opportunity to choose their future and live their dreams, without fear from violence or any other form of inequality.

Before I end, I thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee. Our delegation and our country welcome the Committee's constructive criticism and look forward to receiving the concluding observations.