

Speech on the Launch of the Western Indian Ocean Coastal Challenge (WIOCC)

Wednesday 3rd September at 1900 hrs

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentleman

Good Evening

Allow me to begin by conveying the good wishes of President James Michel who unfortunately cannot be present with us this evening due to another important commitment on the other side of the world.

President Michel is however with us in spirit and assures everyone of the Republic of Seychelles' continuing commitment to join like-minded countries in strongly and decisively protecting biodiversity of global significance while combating climate change and achieving sustainable development.

It is this commitment which inspired him to call for the establishment of the Western Indian Ocean Coastal Challenge (WIOCC) which we are launching here this evening.

Drawing from the examples of the Micronesia Challenge and the Caribbean Challenge Initiative, the WIOCC is a country-led partnership with friendly organisations which seeks to conserve ocean, coastal and island biodiversity and support sustainable livelihoods in the Western Indian Ocean in ways that increase our resilience to climate change and contribute to our sustainable development.

An overall objective is for us to take effective ownership of our ocean spaces, of our Blue Economy, by inspiring leadership and facilitating collaboration in mobilizing political, financial and technical commitments at national and regional levels in the islands and coastal states of the Western Indian Ocean.

More than 30 million people in the Western Indian Ocean islands and East Africa rely on their coastal and marine environment for goods, services, livelihoods, income and social wellbeing.

Our ocean resources are indisputably among our greatest natural assets. I would argue that one of the best ways to protect and make sustainable use of them is through the WIOCC, which has received the strong backing of the Nairobi regional seas convention.

Technical experts from our countries, supported by the Indian Ocean Commission's Islands Project and the Global Island Partnership (GLISPA), have accordingly produced a 20-year vision for the WIOCC.

Today's launching challenges us to pool our resources to strengthen the ability of our coastal and marine environments to further empower our people, improve their livelihoods and social wellbeing, and create wealth and eliminate poverty while at the same time protecting the rich biodiversity of the region for future generations.

Seychelles for example - having already protected more than half its land territory as natural parks and reserves, the largest proportion of protected land in any independent country in the world - further commits under the WIOCC to conserve 30 percent of its 1.4-million-square-kilometre Exclusive Economic Zone as marine protected areas by 2020. Half of the MPA, i.e. 15 percent of our EEZ, will be no-take zones.

(You may wish to explain here that this will be funded through the debt swap)

This is but the highlight of a list of commitments Seychelles is making under the WIOCC today.

Seychelles is joined by Tanzania, Mauritius and Madagascar as we launch the WIOCC, and we look forward to welcoming Comoros, Kenya and Mozambique in the near future. Let us, together, find that balance between enhanced coastal economies and livelihoods and effective conservation of biodiversity that will help alleviate poverty and contribute to greater levels of social wellbeing in our region.

I would like to thank our funding partners, the Indian Ocean Commission and GLISPA which have worked diligently in collaboration with Western Indian Ocean countries over the past four years to make today's launching a reality.

It is now my great honour and privilege to launch the Western Indian Ocean Coastal Challenge on behalf of President James Michel of Seychelles.

I thank you for your kind attention.