

James A Michel
President of the Republic of Seychelles

Your Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the UN,
Your Excellency Mr. Camshek Elias Chin, Vice President of Palau,
Mr. Klaus Topfer, Executive Director of UNEP,
Mr. Len Good, CEO of the Global Environment Facility,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for having accepted my invitation to this side event. The discussions we have had and the pledges that have been made have been most encouraging. On your behalf, I would like to thank the donors for their contribution to our cause. I hope that more will come forward.

When I was made aware of the possibility for Seychelles to be at the helm of this organization on coral reefs, I was conscious that this would be a mammoth task.

We were fortunate that we were partnered in this task by the United Kingdom. This partnership has proved to be invaluable and, together, we have made much headway.

I am heartened to note that there is increasing participation of small island states in this work. I take this opportunity to welcome Palau as our successor in this important mission – to continue to make people aware of the overwhelming importance of coral reefs.

Our coral reefs – so vital to our livelihood – have been battered, even threatened with complete obliteration in some areas as a result of bleaching. And the damage has, beyond doubt, been compounded by the recent tsunami.

The Global Status Reports on Coral Reefs 2004 presents to us in one snap-shot the status of our reefs, and the news is not good. It is painful news, and we need the continual support of developed countries and multilateral organisations to ensure sustainability and also proper management frameworks for coastal and marine ecosystems.

The Minister for Environment and Natural Resources of Seychelles has briefed us on how important it is to the survival of small island developing states that we save the coral reefs. Many countries and regional organisations have come together to address the issue of coral reefs; we now need to pursue a more aggressive approach involving local communities and the private sector in the recovery and management of coral reefs.

We are happy to learn of the funding of an important community-focused project in the Pacific. I would like to see a replication of such an initiative in our region and elsewhere.

The Caribbean initiative also presents many lessons we can learn from, especially as regards the establishment of networks of marine protected areas.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate my thanks to all of our partners, sponsors and countries who have stood and continue to stand by us. I acknowledge with gratitude the contribution of the various governments to the running and operation of the ICRI secretariat, and also for the countless projects implemented in small island states throughout the world.

Islands, Reefs and Communities: Committing to the Future
Side Event at the Mauritius International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for
the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States
13 January 2005, Mauritius

We shall be meeting again in Seychelles at the end of April for the 10th ICRI anniversary. I intend, on this occasion, to launch a global vision for coral reefs partnership. I look forward to welcoming you all to Victoria!

Thank you.