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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, and fellow islanders

First and foremost let me convey the good wishes of President James Michel who unfortunately cannot be present today due to another important conference on the other side of the planet.

This gathering of leaders of island nations and nations with islands, heads of international organizations and other partners is a significant milestone in the progress towards the 2010 target. It is an ambitious target; one which many island nations felt was beyond their reach. I want to recognize and thank Germany for supporting this high level event and their new Life Web initiative. Their support of voluntary commitments will bring great encouragement to islands everywhere and make this target much more attainable.

As you may recall, in January 2005, leaders from most of the island nations of the world converged in Mauritius for the Second International Meeting of the Small Island Developing States. The Global Island Partnership remains one of the most tangible outcomes of that meeting. This Partnership, called for by the Presidents of Seychelles and Palau has grown rapidly to help achieve the vision of increased leadership by small island states and other islands in determining their own future.

GLISPA aims for closer working relationships with all islands around the world that share similar challenges, regardless of size or political status. We recognize that by working in partnership we can build a unique island movement that could alert the world to the bold steps that still need to be taken.

Our Global Island Partnership is demonstrating how true leadership today is about concrete action at the local level to achieve national and global good.

In less than three years, this Partnership has grown beyond our expectations. Without formal structure or dedicated staffing, it has inspired and engaged more than 50 governments and organisations who share this common vision. This group spans all the regions of the world and includes leaders from small islands states, large island nations, overseas territories and donor countries. To date, GLISPA has also helped to secure more than 30 million USD in commitments for island conservation.

The Micronesia Challenge was one of the earliest GLISPA commitments, when it was launched two years ago at our second High Level Event at COP-8 in Curitiba. It is an outstanding example of how this Partnership is working, and you will hear of its exciting progress soon.

Inspired by Micronesia, the government of Grenada also made a major conservation commitment at COP-8, and they were immediately joined by our host, The Bahamas, thereby planting the seeds for the Caribbean Challenge that we are celebrating tonight.

Also at our first GLISPA event, Kiribati announced the creation of the largest marine protected area in the world and Indonesia shared their intention to reach out to five neighbouring countries and seek agreement to protect the heart of coral diversity in the Coral Triangle. Tonight, both of these countries will highlight progress on these visionary initiatives.

At home, in my region, we launched the Western Indian Ocean Marine Protected Area Initiative to strengthen management and begin planning new protected areas, with support from WWF and the Global Environment Facility.

I am convinced that we now have a robust platform of commitments and actions around the world, and we need to set up an effective coordination mechanism to strengthen and expand the Partnership.

Last year with Italy's support, GLISPA developed its first strategy in Rome to chart the next three years and identify an efficient structure for this growing Partnership. I am grateful that the Parties have welcomed GLISPA and its 2008-2010 Strategy in their draft COP-9 decision. This support means a great deal. I also want to express my thanks to the Government of Italy, IUCN, and The Nature Conservancy – who will be announcing their support for a GLISPA Coordination unit later this evening. On our part, Seychelles has already employed staff devoted to the work of GLISPA, in line with the promise that President Michel made in Rome.

When you live on an island, climate change is a reality that you wake to face every day. The fisherman sees it every day as he takes to the sea. Every child sees it when returning to his favourite beach to play. But it is perhaps much harder to see from the aisle of a supermarket in the Western hemisphere. The mass coral bleaching events in 1998, and recurring events in many areas of the planet, is a clear indication that our globe is in a state of peril and we must all do something tangible about it.

Seychelles is ready to do something about it with help from the Global Island Partnership and many of you in the room tonight. Last year in Rome, President Michel launched the Sea Level Rise Foundation to galvanize global action to address the devastating impacts of climate change on our planet. This Foundation will bring resources and expertise together to support small island states, islands and other low-lying areas in adapting to sea-level rise.

We are running out of time, and we MUST engage all nations in avoiding the first climate refugees, those living on islands and in low-lying areas. We MUST combine our resources and know-how to avoid the physical damage and social and economic toll threatening all island societies. And we MUST maintain and restore the natural protection provided by our healthy island ecosystems.

In closing, I am very pleased to note that our Partnership is strong and growing. Now, we must act on our commitments and implement our strategy for the coming three years. It is time for us to reach out to more island nations and nations with islands and to the private sector. It is time for us to focus on key issues, like climate change, where this Partnership can catalyze action at a significant scale and lay the foundation for even greater success and impact in the future.

This high-level meeting is our opportunity to renew and expand this Partnership. The commitments made this evening will take GLISPA to a new level. We have shown that we can indeed translate commitments into results on the ground. We can do it.

To quote the President of Seychelles: "The world will see their success or failure on our islands first."

Thank you.