

Speech of Minister Joel Morgan for the Official Opening of
the Heritage Garden on the occasion of World Food Day, at
Roche Caiman on Friday 16th October 2009

Colleague Minister

Principal Secretaries and Chief Executive Officers

Chairperson of the Wildlife Clubs of Seychelles

Wildlife Clubs' leaders and members

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are gathered here today for the 29th observance of the World Food Day and the 64th anniversary of the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

This year's world food day is observed under the theme **Achieving food security in times of crisis**. The theme is very appropriate and reminds us that during the global economic downturn of 2007/2008, small farmers and rural areas of the world where 70% of the world's hungry live and work are gravely affected by the surge in food and fuel prices. With an estimated increase of 105 million hungry people in 2009, there are now 1.02 billion malnourished people in the world, implying that almost one sixth of all humanity is suffering from hunger.

On a worldwide scale, the factors which caused the food and fuel crisis in 2007/2008 are still present and are attributed to the following:

- Low agricultural productivity;
- High population growth rate in many of the food insecure countries;
- An increase in natural calamities of drought and floods which might be related to climate change;
- Low investment in agriculture;
- Serious water issues, combined with difficult land tenure.

Seychelles has not been spared by both global crises. Today we reflect on our achievements and challenges, which we face daily towards this global objective of achieving a higher food security.

In 2008, faced with the threat of the global food crisis and economic downturn, the Government launched its Food Security Strategy 2008/2011, with the objective of focusing on five main pillars, namely agricultural land, agricultural infrastructure, agricultural inputs and supplies, institutional support and not least, human resource development. In responding further to the food crisis, the Government made available some large expanse of agricultural land and revived investment in the sector.

I am pleased to report today that land that was originally meant for the University of Seychelles was left to young farming entrepreneurs who have since shown their worth and capability in food production. The ex-orchid farm at Barbarons is under the ploughs and shares of three major

farming entrepreneurs, bent on food production. Some large properties have also become available for potential agricultural production. These include the ex-tea plantations at Helvetia and Souvenir on Mahe, as well as the ex nurseries at Grand Anse Mahe.

Agricultural production activities traditionally in the hands of Government, such as the animal feed mill, abbatoir and hatchery were also passed on to the farmers through the Seychelles Farmers' Marketing Cooperative, a strategic partner in national agricultural development. This was done with a view to introduce efficiency in the production process and thus lower the cost of the feed output, which in consequence would lower the cost of production so that consumers could benefit from a cheaper product.

Government was pleased to note the gradual reduction of the cost of livestock feed sold to farmers over the last few months, as well as the reduction in the price of day old chickens.

While we preoccupy ourselves in solving the issues which threaten both our livelihoods and national food security, we also engage ourselves in actions, however small which will further consolidate our position to face global challenges. Today is a historic moment, marking the engagement of Government to build bridges and to form new partnerships. Nature Seychelles and the Seychelles Agricultural Agency will sign an MOU, the objective of which will be to strengthen

the collaboration in the promotion of the ***Heritage Garden*** and the national campaign ***Every home a garden***. This MOU which will be signed by the CEO of both organizations, attest further to the Government's wish to see the development of public-private partnership in the Seychelles. Resources, both financial and human are scarce and often a number of organizations have similar objectives. It suffices then that there is dialogue between them and a commitment to the same objectives, to commit them to similar undertaking by joining forces. This is an example of the way forward in building national resilience and managing moments of crises.

Government will continue to support the agricultural sector in every way possible. The recent call of farmers in the consultative meetings, for Government to maintain the agricultural requisite shops have been noted and I can reassure all today that the Government will continue to stock agricultural inputs and supplies, until such time that the private sector is able to offer consistent and affordable inputs to the farming community. The ongoing study to determine the feasibility of establishing an agricultural insurance, further attests to Government's commitment to help out food producers in times of crises.

As we venture to sign regional agreements within the regional groupings such as COMESA, the SADC etc, we need to take note of our competitiveness in the pricing of agricultural products. The threats to our national food

security might be indirect and may take the form of a surge of imports of cheap agricultural produce. Thus, crises might not always be attributed to catastrophic natural events or global economic downturn but also to our inability to engage in agricultural production activities which are competitive.

The world will become a more turbulent place to live in and our survival will in part be dependent on our ability to produce a substantial amount of the foods we consume. Many a times this is not immediately possible. However, today we set forth yet an example of how best to achieve this objective.

Public private partnership is the way forward. In the coming months, Government will continue to interact with the private sector interests with a view to explore how best they can contribute to national development. National food production is an important domain that will require further private investments. Let us meet half way with the common objective of achieving an appreciable level of food security for there are surely many more crises to come our way.

It now gives me great pleasure to declare the Heritage Garden open.

I thank you for your attention and wish you all a pleasant World Food Day 2009.