

Presidential Speech for Opening Ceremony

13th Commonwealth Regional Conference for Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Africa

Savoy Hotel, Seychelles, 15 May 2023

“Uniting Commonwealth Africa in the Fight Against Corruption”

The Right Honourable Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Baroness Scotland, distinguished delegates, honourable guests, youth of Seychelles, ladies and gentlemen....

Allow me to start by thanking the Commonwealth Secretariat, in collaboration with the Anti-Corruption Commission of Seychelles, for having chosen Seychelles as the venue for this most important ‘Regional Conference of Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa’. Seychelles is indeed proud as this is in itself a testimony, a recognition of what we stand for as a country and how we want to promote a corrupt-free Africa. It is therefore an immense pleasure and honour for me to stand here among the people who strive daily to ensure that the wealth of our countries are not siphoned off, but to oversee rather, that every cent and all resources go towards building the nation and in the welfare of our people.

It is an added pleasure to welcome the Secretary-General back to the Seychelles, a place that allows you to feel at home among the coconut trees and the sandy beaches. An equally warm welcome to Dr Roger Korentang, the Secretariat’s Adviser and Head of Public Sector Governance. I thank you both for your hard work and dedication on behalf of our Commonwealth family. We will always have the welcome mat laid out for you both whenever you come to our shores.

I am delighted that you have chosen the island of Mahé to address the conference theme of *“Uniting Commonwealth Africa in the Fight Against Corruption”*. It is a privilege for us to have such distinguished guests from Botswana, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

In particular, I welcome the Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies of Togo and Gabon, who are attending their first meeting of Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies for Commonwealth Africa today.

Byenveni Sesel. Welcome to our beautiful country.

To our absent brothers and sisters from Cameroon, Lesotho, The Kingdom of Eswatini and Mozambique, we are sorry that you are not able to join us in the room this week. Your contributions will be sorely missed, but I trust that technology will indeed fill the gap. You will be with us in spirit.

If Seychelles is anything to go by, being the Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Africa must be the most unenviable position. Your role within your units are tireless, your work scrutinised constantly and even being exceptional is never good enough. I therefore want to express my profound gratitude for the hard work you do for your country and I wish you added courage in the face of all adversity. Fighting those who have all the financial means through ill-gotten assets is not easy when considering the limited resources placed at your disposal, for while those involved in corruption can recruit top international lawyers and even launch media campaigns to bring down and accuse the government of witch hunting, you can easily find yourself at a disadvantage. But fight corruption, bring out the truth and get those responsible to face the judicial finish we have to keep doing for the sake of our children.

The challenges we face in combatting corruption call for a broad collaboration of agencies, stakeholders, experts and citizens. We do this well, but we could always do it better. I look to every individual in this room today, as well as those watching and listening at home and at work around the Commonwealth for help and support in that quest. We are all gathered for a reason: To come together as one family united through common aspirations; that is, the fight against corruption and the battle we endure when corruption tries to fight back.

I also wish to warmly greet our other international guests and partners and thank them both personally, and on behalf of the people of Seychelles, for helping us in the fight against corruption, money laundering and other serious crimes. Without your help and support, the Seychelles could not have sustained our position in the Transparency International Perception Index as the 23rd least corrupt country in

the world and the first in Africa. Yes, its another great achievement for our Commonwealth family.

A decade on from the historic signing of the Commonwealth Charter, Seychelles is absolutely committed to that one voice in upholding the principles of the Commonwealth, the shared values and aspirations enshrined in the charter – peace and justice; tolerance, respect and solidarity; care for our environment, and for the most vulnerable among us.

We are grateful for the support and assistance provided by the Commonwealth in areas such as education, health, and economic development. As the Secretary-General has previously said *‘Every dollar lost to corruption, is a dollar lost to investing in a child’s education, healthcare or much needed infrastructure.’* In Seychelles, every dollar lost to corruption is magnified in a lack of schools, hospitals and other crucial facilities that make up our fundamental human rights.

In London last week I had the honour to represent the people of Seychelles at the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles the Third, the Head of the Commonwealth. I was privileged enough to engage in many pre-coronation events and was hosted by His Majesty and the Secretary General at Marlborough House, the Headquarters of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Secretary-General and I, along with the other 55 leaders from the Commonwealth's member states met to discuss issues of mutual interest. Collectively, we reaffirmed our determination in observing the principles of democracy, tolerance, rule of law, respect for human rights, and peaceful co-existence for the greater good of society and the betterment of our people.

In the meeting we spoke about initiatives to support the empowerment of young people, as this year has been designated the Commonwealth Year of Youth. Sixty percent of the Commonwealth’s population, that is one and a half billion people are under the age of 30, and youth empowerment is critical in realising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is therefore a joy to be here with representatives of the Seychellois youth who will perform for us later this morning.

Young people, you are our lifeblood, you are the future. As policymakers and leaders, we have a responsibility to ensure that you are placed at the centre of

development. Youth mainstreaming is essential to inclusive development outcomes and Seychelles recognises young people as key actors in our Nation's progress.

Last month we relaunched the Seychelles National Youth Assembly, making history as the first democratically elected cohort. The 14-year-old Speaker of the Youth Assembly from the second largest island of Praslin told the 24 members to "*keep your ears to the ground and your eyes peeled*". We should all take note and adopt this stance when it comes to rooting out corruption.

As leaders in our offices within the Commonwealth, we have a moral obligation to offer each and every individual a future replete with opportunities for personal development and growth. Delivering a future of prosperity for our youth and uniting Africa requires unwavering commitments to the ideals of mutual respect and shared responsibility.

The Commonwealth, and in particular Commonwealth Africa provides us with a platform to collaborate and work towards the common good of our people by fighting back against corruption.

In preparing this speech I looked at the Communique from the 12th Regional conference in Rwanda last year. You rightly agreed that corruption must be tackled more vigorously. You properly committed to stronger local, regional, and international cooperation. You promised to collaborate to enhance the capacity-building of corruption investigators and prosecutors, and to support the speedy and unfettered repatriation of recovered assets. I challenge you over the next four days to look amongst yourselves and consider honestly whether you delivered on that Communique.

Seychelles is taking over the Chair of the Regional Association. This is a big responsibility and a big challenge, but one we relish. Distinguished participants, in your discussions and drafting of the *Seychelles Communique* set ourselves a challenge.

- 1. Please remember that corruption is not only about bribes.** People, especially the poor get hurt when resources are wasted or diverted. That's why it is so important to understand the different kinds of corruption that infect our society and develop smart responses.

2. **Give power and voice to the people.** Suggest and create anti-corruption pathways that give your citizens relevant tools to engage in helping you identify priorities, problems and find solutions.
3. **Cut out some of the red tape.** Bring together formal and informal processes, government and non-governmental groups to change behaviour and monitor progress.
4. **Use the power of technology.** Here in Seychelles, we strive to build dynamic and continuous exchanges between key stakeholders: my government, our citizens and businesses, law enforcement, civil society groups, media, schools and academia. Consider everyone has a vital part to play.
5. **Get the incentives right from the start.** Seek to align and promote anti-corruption measures with market, behavioural, and social forces. Getting the private sector to adopt integrity standards is a smart business decision, especially for companies interested in doing business with the World Bank Group and other development partners.
6. **We all know sanctions matter.** Punishing corruption is a vital component of any effective anti-corruption effort. Impunity, power, freedom and money - where lawfully possible, take away all of them.
7. **Act globally and locally.** Keep us, citizens, engaged on corruption at local, national, regional and international levels in line with the scale and scope of corruption. Make use of this incredible network that you have developed and the many platforms that exist for engagement.
8. **Look to build capacity for those who need it most.** It is no coincidence that countries that suffer from chronic fragility, conflict and violence are often the ones that have the fewest internal resources to combat corruption. Look amongst yourselves and identify ways to leverage international resources to support and sustain good governance.
9. **And finally, learn from each other by doing.** Keep monitoring, evaluating and sharing. Ask yourselves what works well, what could work

better, and then what you would do differently next time. Adapt and make a difference.

Secretary-General, distinguished delegates, national and international partners, I wish you all the very best for the conference and look forward to seeing the outcomes.

Dr Koranteng, I now appeal for the Conference to be officially declared open.

Thank you