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Presentation

‘Returning stolen assets to Seychelles and the Government support in fighting corruption through ACCS funding’

**Minister Naadir Hassan
Minister of Finance,
National Planning
and Trade**

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**Baroness Patricia Scotland, Secretary General of the Commonwealth,
Mr. Roger Koranteng, head of the Public Sector Governance,
Commonwealth Secretariat
All protocol observed,**

It is my pleasure to address you today on the subject of corruption and stolen assets. In doing so, I will focus on the experience of the Seychelles; like many other countries have not been spared the impact of corruption and its consequences for our development.

It is a sad reality that millions and billions of state resources are lost every year due to corrupt practices. These are resources which could have been used to invest in schools, hospitals, roads, social programmes and housing for our people.

According to the UNDP of the approximately US\$13 trillion that governments spend on public expenditure, up to 25 percent is lost to corruption. From 2000 to 2015, the illegal money leaving Africa amounted to \$836 billion, about 3.7 percent of its GDP.

Ladies and gentlemen as you can observe, these figures are astronomical and worrying.

Hence it is imperative that:

- 1: We do whatever we can to stop the scourge of corruption and
2. We put our efforts in returning the stolen assets to the people

If i may quote (Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director, UNODC) 'Restoring proceeds of corruption to their rightful owner is a development imperative. By returning corrupt funds, we can mobilize resources to reduce poverty and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. It is also the right thing to do.'

Seychelles, being a small vulnerable island state, we have minimal resources to cater for socio-economic development. Therefore, is it imperative that corruption in the public service cannot be tolerated. As a small island state with limited avenues of generating wealth, every little cent lost to malpractices, has a huge impact on the socio-economic plan of the country. Our population should be aware that corruption affects them directly, as money being siphoned off to individuals, is funds lost that could otherwise be used to buy medication, provide social safety net or invest in infrastructures.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is for that reason, that in 2016, the ACCS was formed. As can be expected, given that this was a new concept for Seychelles, it did not lead to instant results or successes. In fact, in its first 5 years, no cases were

brought by the ACCS for prosecution even though there were numerous allegations. This was as a result of lack of resources, lack of funding, expertise, experience and other forms of support.

It is only in 2021, that ACCS, made its first arrest and it relates to one of the biggest corruption case seen in the country and for that matter in the region. So what changed?

Fundamentally, the new administration ran on a manifesto of eliminating corruption and bringing back stolen assets. Hence, the political will and support was there. With that we also saw a significant increase of 587% in the funding from the budget to the ACCS. It is important to highlight that to be able to successfully conclude a complex corruption case, significant resources are required. From getting the intelligence, hiring expert investigators and researchers and not forgetting ensuring that we have the necessary legal resources when the case is prosecuted. Not to forget communications specialist are also required as often powerful and influential figures involved in corruption, when being investigated will resort to a campaign of disinformation to impact on the credibility of the investigation.

Ladies and gentlemen, this requires significant funding.

For Ministers of Finance, this can often be a tricky situation. How does one justify the extra funding, especially at a time of great fiscal restraint? One has to consider the potential return on investment, in order to justify the expense.

With the support through the budget, we also observed many international partners willing to help and assist the ACCS with technical expertise in order to help with very complex cases. If i may speculate is that when the Government is willing to support the ACCS, this no doubt gives confidence to other partners to provide assistance.

Just to give some examples, Special relationships have been developed with UK law enforcement agencies including the UK National Crime Agency, the Home Office, and the Crown Prosecution Service, as well as other international law enforcement agencies such as the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation and Australian Federal Police, with assistance given from many other donors such as the European Union, UK Foreign Office and United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime.

Let me emphasize how important it is that any country that is serious about fighting corruption and bringing back stolen assets needs to have very close working relationships with other law enforcement agencies in other countries.

Given the complexities of returning stolen assets especially the fact that in many cases these assets have been transferred out of the country, it is critical that the ACCS together with local authorities engage to have Mutual legal assistance agreements with partner countries and in line with, discussions have started with a number of countries over asset sharing agreements. The Seychelles authorities, together with the ACCS has already embarked on working on this.

Government support should also not be limited to only budgetary support. In fact strong laws need to be enacted and existing ones needs to be strengthened. in the last few years, we, the Government has supported the ACCS through amendments of various laws, more specifically, the corruption laws, the introduction of beneficial ownership register and the AML law amongst others. These amendments have given more tools to the ACCS to deliver on its mandate.

Distinguished delegates, one point of caution, Government supporting Anti-corruption agencies does not mean influencing the work of the agency. It is important that once funding is secured the Government does not get involve in the investigation. This is important to ensure the independence of the agency and its credibility.

Ladies and gentlemen, to conclude I want to make the following summary. First, if countries in Africa are to reach their development potential and achieve the SDGs, it is imperative that that the level of public corruption is drastically reduced. Moreover, it is also critical that much more effort is put into returning stolen assets. To achieve that our countries need the support of the international community as the process to return stolen assets can often be complex and long. The means to hide the assets are indeed complex and opaque. Hence, an international effort is required to achieve success. Secondly, domestically Governments have to support the Anti-Corruption agencies with the necessary resources. Investigating corruption cases and tracing the stolen assets and prosecuting the cases require advance expertise.

Thirdly, Government needs to ensure laws are strengthened to ensure anti-corruption agencies have the tools to do their job.

Finally, let me say, the job that is done to fight corruption is a noble and important one. We cannot let the cycle of corruption continue or else our future generation will bear the consequences. We cannot and should not let that happen.

Thank you!!