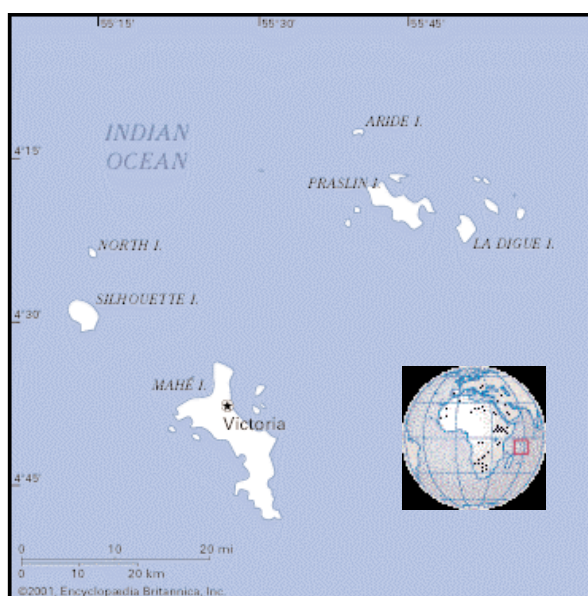




FEBRUARY 2003

Post-Election Bulletin: Seychelles 2002

Heather Deegan



Official name: Republic of Seychelles
Population (2000): 80,000.
Population projection: (2010) 94,400.
Gross national product:
U.S.\$526 m /£394 million
(US\$6,850/UK £4,837 per capita)
Real GDP Growth: 1.4%(2000)
Ruling Party: Seychelles People's
Progressive Front (SPPF)
(English)/Front Progressiste du Peuple
Seychellois (FPPS) (French)
Head of Government and Chief of
State: President France Albert RENE
(since June 1977)
(Independence from UK 29 June 1976)

The Republic of Seychelles is located in the Indian Ocean, approximately 994 miles/1,600 km east of Kenya and comprises 115 islands and islets dispersed over 250,900 miles/650,000km of ocean, covering a total land area of 175 miles/432 km. 90% of the population live on Mahe Island. Victoria is the capital.

President & Key Ministers – January 2003

President, Minister of Defence & Internal Affairs: France Albert Rene

**Vice-President Minister of Economic Planning, Finance, Informational
Technology & Communications:** James Michel

Administration & Manpower Development: Noelli Alexander

Environment: Ronald Jumeau

Education & Youth: Danny Faure

Social Affairs & Employment: Dolor Ernesta

Foreign Affairs: Jeremie Bonnelame

Health: Patrick Pillay

Industry & International Business: Jacquelin Dugasse

Land Use & Habitat: Joseph Belmont

Central Bank Governor: Francis Chang Leng

POLITICAL DATA

Cabinet: Council of Ministers appointed by the President.

Constitution: 18 June 1993.

Suffrage: 17 years of age; universal.

Legislature: Unicameral National Assembly has 34 members, elected for a term of five years. 25 members are elected in single-seat constituencies by popular vote; 9 are allocated on a proportional basis to parties winning at least 9% of the vote. Members serve five-year terms.

Next elections: 2006 (Presidential) and 2007 (legislative).

Main political parties: Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF), the majority party; Seychelles National Party (formerly the United Opposition), opposition party.

Judiciary: The President appoints Court of Appeal and Supreme Court judges.

Religion: 90% Roman Catholic; 8% Anglican; 2% other.

ELECTION RESULTS

National Assembly Elections: 6 December 2002

PARTY	2002		1998	
Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF)	54.3 %	23 seats	61.7 %	30 seats
Seychelles National Party (formerly the United Opposition (UO))	42.6 %	11 seats	26.1 %	3 seats
Democratic Party	3.1 %	0 seats	12.1 %	1 seat

Sources: Seychelles Nation; electionworld.org

Presidential Elections: 2001

France Albert RENE, Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF)	54.2%
Wavel RAMKALAWAN (United Opposition)	44.9%
Philippe Boule	0.9%

POLITICAL REVIEW

The National Assembly elections of 2002 marked a shift in the political climate of the Seychelles, with opposition parties significantly increasing their total percentage of the vote to around 45%. Although some observers expected the Seychelles National Party (SNP) (formerly the United Opposition (UO)) to win the general election, it did gain 11 seats in contrast to the 3 seats it won in 1998. A difference of 6,000 votes exists between the ruling party and the opposition, with the SNP needing only 3,000 votes to gain parity with the Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF). These gains have been made despite an estimated 10,000 people failing to cast their vote together with great disparities in expenditure between the parties.

Whilst the ruling SPPF spent c72million rupees (£8million) on the election, the SNP could only spend c2million rupees (£250,000).

Critics suggest a level of uncertainty existed among the electorate as to the secrecy of the ballot, especially given the suspicions of SPPF coercion during the presidential elections of 2001. Although no overt electoral irregularities appeared in 2002, reports of elderly voters having their identity cards removed and being obliged to vote in the presence of SPPF members point to less conspicuous methods of electoral manipulation. There is a strong constituency of support for the ruling party among the police and those employed within the public sector, which is perhaps inevitable in a country in which a dominant party has ruled for 25 years and exercises extensive control. During the SNP's electoral campaign, tense situations

occurred in predominantly SPPF strongholds but the police offered no assistance. Equally, although campaigning three days before an election is proscribed by law, the ruling party continued with impunity.

One of the successes of the SNP has been the enlistment of European Union observers to monitor the election. This resulted from a proactive campaign by the SNP which placed pressure on the government to agree to monitoring from a range of organizations including the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Commonwealth and Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie. It is hoped the SNP may now be in a position to exercise some influence in the parliamentary committees and within the National Assembly more generally, despite the fact that in the past motions proposed by the opposition have always been rejected by the dominant SPPF. There also seems to be some degree of conciliation between President Rene and the SNP leader, Mr Wavel Ramkalawan, both of whom accepted the electoral outcome in 2002. In fact, since the elections a dialogue has developed between the President and Mr Ramkalawan, resulting in a more conciliatory attitude of SPPF politicians towards the opposition. However, government party members are unlikely to shift allegiance to the SNP.

The President has been in office for a quarter of a century and there has been some speculation that he may retire before the elections of 2006, when he is due to stand down. This period is difficult for President Rene, who has presided over human rights abuses, and now, reportedly, fears for his safety when no longer in office. These concerns are driving his dialogue with the opposition and it has been suggested that whether or not the President stands down is largely dependent on these talks. If he were to retire, his obvious successor, the Vice-President, is regarded as being unacceptable to the wider population and opposition political parties, again on account of his human rights violations. The weakened position of President Rene and the uncertainty as to his successor are reasons why many believe the political environment is moving in the direction of the opposition.

Of course, the President may attempt to resolve the situation in the tried and tested manner of attempting to change the constitution, although, unlike many African presidents, he has made little attempt to do so in the past. Some believe he has been largely prevented from doing so by the prospect of considerable unrest and popular opposition, but others believe that given the absolute power exercised by the party/state relationship, any criticism would be ignored. A major worry has been the level of complacency that has engulfed the rule of law – in particular, the curious appointment procedures of

judges who, rather than being recruited locally, are being sought overseas through contractual appointments from countries such as Mauritius, Tanzania and India.

Worried about the government's attitude towards criticism, the Congress of the Seychelles National Party called for the establishment of an independent trade union, affiliated to no political party and in receipt of no funding from the ruling party. The independent Seychelles National Trade Union was established in 2002, funded by individual member subscriptions. Although a Tripartite Commission exists to coordinate state/business/labour relations, under the Industrial Relations Act strikes are illegal. Equally, the position of public-sector workers, almost half the country's workforce, is difficult in that they are not permitted to join an independent trade union. The SNP sees this restriction as a human rights issue and is committed to pushing for reform. It also believes the government should open up the economy in order to attract greater levels of foreign investment. Linked to the issue of market liberalization has been criticism of the Seychelles Marketing Board in that it acts to restrict the freedom of merchants to import goods. Meanwhile, controls on lending exercised by the Central Bank are viewed as inhibiting diversification of the economy.

On a positive front, there has been some expansion of civil society, and the press endeavours to provide information to the population in a geographically diverse state. The President's long-running legal action against an opposition newspaper, Regar, and other civil actions have been withdrawn, and more recently the press has been able to provide better coverage of the activities of independent trade unionists and members of the opposition. It is also hoped that the dialogue between President Rene and the opposition will create a less oppressive political environment. Good relations also exist between different religious communities. The impact on the economy of the events of 11 September 2001 was not as severe as anticipated, and with this more conciliatory approach by the government the country could move towards political adjustment and economic progress.

IMPORTANT ISSUES:

Political leadership and dialogue with opposition
Opposition initiatives in the National Assembly
Trade union rights/civil society activities
Press freedom
Economic investment

Relevant Web addresses

www.m-w.com/cgi-bin
www.photius.com
www.electionworld.org
www.bbc.org
www.un.org
www.cia.org
www.eiu.co

For further information contact: Dr Heather Deegan
Elections in Africa Series, Africa Programme, RIIA
Email: h.deegan@mdx.ac.uk

The Africa Programme at Chatham House was launched in July 2002, kindly supported by the FCO, DFID, Shell International, BAE Systems, Lonmin and South African Breweries. The programme is made up of a number of thematic projects, including the Armed Non-State Actor Project. Projects on the Gulf of Guinea, Elections in Africa, and Foreign Policy and Africa are also under way. In addition to commissioning or conducting its own research the Africa Programme holds meetings and seminars. Topics covered to date include conflict diamonds and the Kimberley process, the political economy of São Tomé and Príncipe, and Kenya's Minister of Foreign Affairs talking about the challenges his country faces following the historic change of government in December 2002.

If you are interested in forthcoming events or research by the Africa Programme contact:
Liz.horn@riia.org

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