

Chapter One

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Seychelles became an independent republic in 1976 under the leadership of an alliance between the Democratic Party (DP) led by Sir James Mancham, who became President, and the Seychelles People's United Party whose leader Mr France Albert René was appointed as Prime Minister. Mr René seized power soon thereafter, in June 1977, through a coup d'état at which time the National Assembly was dissolved. The Seychelles People's United Party was renamed the Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF). A new one-party Constitution was proclaimed in March 1979.

Following the decision of President René to restore multi-party democracy in 1991, a new constitution was approved following a referendum in 1993. Under the new dispensation, the National Assembly allowed for 22 directly elected members, and 11 members nominated by political parties based on proportional representation resulting from their performance at the polls. Presidential and Parliamentary elections in July 1993 were won convincingly by President René and the SPPF. Sir James Mancham and the DP came second. The United Opposition led by Mr Wavel Ramkalawan obtained one seat in the National Assembly.

Multi-party elections were also held in 1998 and 2001 and contested by the same main parties and one independent candidate, Mr Phillip Boullé. President René was returned with 66.7% of the vote in 1998, and the SPPF secured 61.71% of the vote in the National Assembly elections. The United Opposition increased its share of the vote significantly, securing 19.53% of the Presidential and 26.06% of the National Assembly vote, and later became the Seychelles National Party (SNP). President René of the SPPF won the 2001 elections with a reduced majority, attaining 54.19% of the vote to Mr Ramkalawan's 44.95% and Mr Philippe Boullé's 0.86%.

President René stepped down on 14 April 2004 and handed power to the Vice President, James Michel. This marked a change in the Seychellois political landscape as President René had ruled Seychelles for the previous twenty-seven years, firstly through a coup d'état and subsequent one-party state structure, and then under a democratic mandate from 1993. The 2006 campaign saw Mr Michel contest the Presidential ticket in his own right, having inherited the position from his predecessor.

President Michel won the 28-30 July 2006 Presidential Election with 54% of the vote. Opposition Leader Mr Wavel Ramkalawan obtained 45.7% of the vote.

A three-person Commonwealth Expert Team (supported by two staff) was present and concluded that "the 2006 Presidential elections were credible and allowed for the expression of the will of the Seychellois people".

The CET recommended, *inter alia*, measures towards the further improvement of the effective separation of state and party political functions, the establishment of an Electoral Commission based on international good practice, and the establishment of an independent Public Service Commission to address, among other things, the appointment and promotion of public employees. It also recommended mechanisms to facilitate inter-party dialogue, limits on campaign financing and strict enforcement of existing legislation on accountability and transparency, and a reduction in the prohibitive cost of establishing and operating radio and television stations by private and/or community interests.

In early October 2006 Parliament passed a law banning political or religious organisations from running radio stations, sparking a demonstration by opposition supporters which was broken up violently by the police; the Leader of the Opposition Wavel Ramkalawan and others were injured. The Opposition subsequently boycotted Parliament, leading to early elections.

National Assembly elections were last held from 10-12 May 2007. Twenty-five members are elected by popular vote, and nine are allocated on a proportional basis to parties winning at least 10% of the vote; members serve five-year terms. The ruling SPPF party won 56.2% of the vote and gained 23 seats, while the opposition SNP won 43.8% of the vote and gained 11 seats, the same result as the 2002 election. The Commonwealth did not observe these elections.

A Constitutional Review Committee was established on 16 April 2008 by the President as an ad-hoc body to review the 1992 Constitution, as is required by law. The Committee, composed of persons reflecting a broad spectrum of public opinion, submitted its Report to the President on 21 December 2009. The Report contained substantial proposals for constitutional reform, including matters that would impinge directly on the electoral process.

In November 2008 the International Monetary Fund agreed a two-year \$26-million assistance package for the indebted Seychelles economy, which was also entailed substantial economic reforms. In 2009, the Seychelles Government negotiated a substantial cancellation of its \$800 million foreign debt.

Since April 2009 Seychelles has received substantial military and other support from the international community to counter the threat of Somali piracy. In July 2010, the first successful prosecution of pirates in Seychelles was concluded, and eleven Somalis were jailed.