

Seychelles Minister of Health
Mrs. Mitcy LARUE

Seychelles Minister of Health Statement at ICN2

The Seychelles delegation applauds the adoption of the Rome Declaration and the Framework for Action, and looks forward to their vigorous and sustained implementation in collaboration with our national and international partners.

Food, nutrition and health are constant preoccupations of all nations. In a small island developing state, the connections are even more immediate and the challenges more daunting.

Being small and geographically isolated, with limited potential for food production, we are heavily reliant on imported food. Our vulnerability to environmental and economic challenges means that availability, price and quality of food are constant preoccupations. Climate change is not a distant threat, but a reality. Changes in weather patterns lead to uncertainty with regards to rainfall and periods of drought, and have direct impact on crop production, as well as environmental damage. Changes in sea temperature influence fish stocks and fish migration patterns. We have no influence on the international food market and we face soaring food prices. Social challenges include changes in dietary habits which, combined with reduced physical activity, leads to an increasing prevalence of obesity. 60% of the adult population are overweight, a 70% rise over the past 25 years. One in four of our children are overweight.

The Rome Declaration and Framework for Action will give added support and guidance to our national efforts to improve nutrition in our population. We have recently published the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy and are currently in the process of reviewing our National Nutrition Policy. As the names imply, these are national policies aiming to mobilise and harmonise action across all sectors. Issues of food and nutrition involve individuals, families and communities; require action by government, the private sector and civil society; and have to address economic, social, cultural and environmental factors.

We realise that good nutrition must start with the right attitudes and habits from an early age. We are actively pursuing a School Nutrition Policy which has the commitment of both the Health and Education sectors. Schools should provide a healthy environment, and children should be encouraged to adopt good nutrition. It is important to combine this message with measures to ensure that school meals, whether provided by the school system or private vendors, are nutritionally sound. We have also launched a major national health campaign to create awareness on individual responsibility for health, and we are now working on strengthening the focus, in the coming year, on health in the home. Encouraging home gardens and healthy eating are important components of this focus.

Our country is blessed with an ocean which remains rich in fish. Fish is our main source of protein and also provides a number of essential micronutrients. We see a trend towards consuming less fish and more meat; a trend that we believe needs to be addressed. We are concerned that among some food regulators, especially in the Western world, there is an emphasis on the risk of fish consumption, rather than the benefits. This arises from concerns

that methylmercury, which is present in varying amounts in most fish, might adversely affect children's development when mothers eat fish during pregnancy. Close to 30 years of scientific research in Seychelles shows consistently that the benefits to child development outweigh any potential risk. I commend the joint WHO/FAO expert panel which, in 2011, recommended that member states should emphasise the benefits of consuming fish and the risks of avoiding fish in relation to this issue.

We remain committed to good nutrition, and I take this opportunity to renew this commitment. We need to strengthen action among all the partners: those who produce the food, those who can influence affordability, those who ensure quality, those who influence attitudes and behaviours. Our action must be coordinated and sustained and, above all, encourage the greatest involvement of the families and communities.

Finally, let me join others who have spoken before me to express our solidarity with the countries and people affected by Ebola, to salute the health workers who provide care at great cost to their own safety and health, and to thank all those who provide support and material assistance.