

## **Keynote Comments by the Chair of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Piracy, Seychelles Secretary of State Barry Faure**

*Given at the Oceans Beyond Piracy 'State of Maritime Piracy 2016' Report Launch Event, UK Chamber of Shipping, London, UK, 3.5.2017*

Admiral Sir James Burnell-Nugent,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished guests,

Dear Friends,

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be present here today in this fair city of London, a capital city rich in history, known and appreciated by all. For a long time, the Port of London on the River Thames, existing since the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD, was the world's port, and the facilitator for growth and economic success as it still remains today.

Coming from an island state, Seychelles, like our neighbours in the region, and all maritime states, we understand only too well the importance of maritime trade, and what the free unimpeded movement on the high seas means to the survivability of a country and a people. Without it we fail and we fall.

The story of Seychelles and how acts of piracy in the heady days of 2009, when ships and crew were seemingly being taken, daily, is I think well appreciated. At one moment in time with our fishermen being taken hostage, an LPG shipment on its way to Seychelles being hijacked with only a week of cooking gas left in stock in country, with the tuna vessels avoiding Seychelles' rich waters, with cruise ships fearing piracy refusing to come to our shores, with tourism offices around the world wanting to know if it was safe to swim off of our tranquil beaches for fear that bathers could be accosted by pirates, piracy affected my country and our people deeply.

That was then.

After years of effort, the international community, working together with Seychelles and other regional states, was able to successfully contain and reduce acts of piracy to such a level that in 2012, there were no successful acts of piracy against registered vessels within the Western Indian Ocean, where once piracy flourished. Sadly, on March 13<sup>th</sup> 2017, with an attack against the MV Aris 13, the first successful attack was registered.

Suffice it to say, following the MV Aris 13 incident we recorded several other brazen acts against dhows off the coast of Somalia.

We can well understand that with success apparent against piracy off the coast of Somalia, that a move to declare victory on the horizon would be forthcoming. Now victory has not been declared and I think that we are all in agreement that for the moment victory cannot be arrived at as long as instability prevails on the shores.

All this is happening against a backdrop of a substantial reduction of surveillance operations at sea. NATO's 'Ocean Shield' already terminated since last year. And the EUNAVFOR's operation 'Atalanta' is expected to wind up as of December 2018. The resurgence of piracy gives us cause for concern and it is a wake-up call to the international community to reverse its withdrawal/reduction strategy. Similarly, it gives cause and impetus for regional states, like Seychelles, to be ready as best we can.

The years of engagement, of course, have not gone to waste. Regional states have welcomed the various initiatives that the EU, including the UK, the UNODC and other international partners like, India, the UAE, China and France for that matter, have brought forward in order to build up operational capability and improve maritime domain awareness. Notably, the EU's maritime surveillance programme, MASE, is putting in place a regional maritime fusion of information centre and a regional centre for operational coordination centre in Madagascar and Seychelles, respectively.

It is imperative, therefore, irrespective of what transpires with international operational missions that such engagements and opportunities to improve maritime security postures of states within the Western Indian Ocean increase.

That is why we look forward to "MASE 2" as a follow-up to preserve and build on the gains of MASE 1.

As I address you here in London at the invitation of the UK Government, it is relevant that I pay tribute to the critical role of the UK Government. The UK has indeed been a responsible international partner in the fight against piracy. It has done so in patrolling our waters to keep international shipping lanes and regional seas safe and in providing maritime capacity building and maritime law enforcement capabilities. The UK has done so both directly through bilateral cooperation and indirectly through the multilateral programmes and engagements, such as through the EU and through the UNODC.

In Seychelles, we are particularly thankful to the UK for a number of meaningful cooperation projects. The most visible of these is the Regional Anti-Piracy Prosecution and Intelligence Coordination Centre (RAPPIC), the result of a bilateral agreement signed in London on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2012 between the then Prime Minister David Cameron and former President James Michel to set up a maritime intelligence and information centre with the objective to bring military and law enforcement capabilities from various countries together under one roof in order to facilitate the tracking of pirates and the organization of enforcement actions against pirate financiers and leaders. Through this Agreement, the UK Government funded 555 000 Pounds Sterling for the construction of RAPPIC. Other governments (like the Netherlands) and partners (like Interpol), also joined in to support the functioning and operation of the Centre.

It is perhaps opportune that I mention here that the change in the dynamics of transnational organized crime led Seychelles and its partners to agree to the change from RAPPIC to REFLECS3 or the Regional Fusion and Law Enforcement Centre for Safety and Security at Sea. It also conveniently makes way for the new intelligence sharing mechanism under the EU-funded MASE programme to be set up in Madagascar and Seychelles where REFLECS3 will host the new Regional Centre for Operational Coordination. REFLECS3 will at the same time host the new National Information Sharing and Coordination Centre, which the UK Government has agreed to assist us in setting up along the lines of UK's National Information Sharing Centre.

Other concrete projects worth mentioning here are the 600 000 Pounds Sterling enhanced optical imagery equipment for our coastguard to allow surveillance aircraft to take high image quality video and photographs to aid in the capture of pirates and provide valuable evidence in court cases; the donation of a Tyne Class ex-RNLI boat to assist our coastguard in the anti-piracy effort. The UK has invested considerable resources in the UNODC to assist the regional states of Somalia, Kenya and Seychelles to build regional capacity for piracy prosecution and detention. The UK has also been instrumental in lobbying the EU time and again, to extend the mandate of Operation Atalanta which ensures the necessary presence of the EU Naval Force in the region.

We look to the UK to continue to lobby for us to ensure that the international community remains engaged in the fight against piracy.

Shortly, Seychelles will be holding the CGPCS 20<sup>th</sup> Plenary of the group in Mauritius. Co-hosted by the Indian Ocean Commission, from the 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> July 2017 under the theme “Leaving a Lasting Legacy”, it will be a moment over those few days to once again come together to discuss progress to date of the CGPCS, providing an opportunity as well for us to understand recent events where vessels once again were at risk of hijack and crew being held hostage.

Having celebrated the achievement of having all hostages from the Naham 3 released last October 2016, thanks in great part to the work of the OBP, that achievement then marked the end of all known hostages being held by Somali pirates. It was indeed a great and welcome day for all involved and for the families of the crew being released.

We need to continue to have success in our efforts as we remain engaged and focused in ensuring that even as pirate kingpins meet to strategize, that we do not blink calling it mission accomplished and by that leaving the high seas in totality to a band of bandits to do as they will. After all, “leaving a lasting legacy for the region”, the theme of this year’s Chair of the CGPCS, means in part that the international community leaves success behind so that our high seas deliver to our nations, growth, opportunity and continued trade unimpeded to one and all.

I look forward to meeting with you over the coming few days, at the Somali Conference on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2017, here in London, then again in Mauritius as from 5<sup>th</sup> July 2017.

I thank the OBP for inviting me to the launch of their 2016 Report and wish to confirm that they are equally invited to take an active part in CGPCS’ 20<sup>th</sup> Session.

I thank you.