Strategies to Increase Women’s Representation in Parliament
In SIDS

Introduction
Madame Chairperson, Honorables from the SIDS, invited guests, Ladies and Gentlemen - good morning.

It is indeed an honor to address you here today and proud to represent my beloved country Seychelles and to share with you some of the Seychelles’ achievement and experiences in terms of women’s role in Seychelles in general.

For those of you who do not know, Seychelles is situated in the Indian Ocean, northeast of Madagascar and attained independence from the British in 1976.

With a population of about 90’000 people (representing about 46’900 men and 44’000 women), Seychelles depends mainly on Tourism and Fisheries, the two being the main pillars of its economy.

Seychelles is a melting pot with a population originating from all corners of the world.
About 92% of the adult population is literate and free health and education are accessible to all children. Indeed, school is compulsory up to the age of fifteen.

Our constitution recognizes equal access to free primary healthcare and education to all its citizens irrespective of gender. Similarly, it recognizes equal protection of women and men under the law and their right to participate freely in Government and to be paid equally for equal work.

Traditionally, since the onset of politics in Seychelles, women have played a very important role not only to ensure the independence of the country but in its political evolution as well.

It is pertinent to note that Seychelles had been a one party socialist state from 1977 to 1993. With the onset of multi party politics in 1993, it came as no surprise that women were in the forefront in the divergent and vibrant politics that ensued.

Subsequent elections saw an increase participation of women, from 12 candidates in 1993 to 19 candidates in 2012, representing an increase of 24%. At this point, it is important that you know that they were contesting for 25 constituencies.

Today, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Seychelles rank fifth in the world in terms of percentage of women representation in parliament and second in Africa, after Rwanda.
Our achievement is outstanding, in that it was achieved without a quota system in place or without any affirmative law to favour women.

We have instead adopted a policy of advocacy, (support and encouragement) and awareness raising in order to promote the greater involvement of women in politics and decision making positions.

At this juncture, may I add that 92% of staff of the Secretariat of the Parliament of Seychelles are women. 27% of Cabinet are women, 46% of permanent secretaries are women, 43% of Chief Executive Officers of Parastatals, 55% of Director Generals, and 82% of District Administrators are women. We also have had our first female Central Bank Governor this year.

The question that immediately come to mind is how has this been achieved in our country?.

Whilst it is true that historically and culturally Seychelles have been a matriarchal society, with most households being led by women, it is my sincere belief that our impressive statistics are the results of women empowerment over the last three decades. Access to free education has resulted in more girls going to universities than boys. Free primary healthcare has provided all the protection that women need as a mother and as a citizen. Indeed, in the Seychelles, women are given three months maternity leave to be with the kids after delivery.
A progressive system of Government has ensured that there is political commitment for a level playing field between men and women. Subsequently, the social economic status of women is now rated as high as men, thus resulting in greater participation in politics by women and in boosting their self confidence. These achievements have resulted in greater respect for women by our men who are now more than willing to help with the traditional chores such as looking after children that have hampered the participation of women in public life. In many homes, it is now normal that men do the cooking and women the campaigning.

Despite our achievements, gender empowerment remains a sensitive issue in our country. Within the Ministry of Social Affairs, there is a gender secretariat which is working on a National Gender Policy and Plan of Action to ensure that gender parity (equality) in public, private and civil society is maintained. It may seem trivial (unimportant) but even our laws now have to be gender sensitive, so much so that the word ‘he’ does not appear in any of our modern legislation and if it ever does, it is accompanied by /she.

Amongst the four pillars of the gender policy are the following:

i. Encourage the participation of women in politics and in decision-making
ii. Economic empowerment of women
iii. Fight against gender-based violence
iv. Ensure sustainable development
Why is it important to have women’s representative in parliament?
As mothers, as companion to men, gifted with equal mental capacities – women should have equal right to freedom and liberty.

We should always remember that by denying women their rights to fully participate, we are stifling the potentials of 50% of the population.

- Most issues affecting society first affect women and children – so their voices have to be heard
- It is women’s right – and it is equally important for women to participate fully in politics and all decision making position
- Women’s perspectives are vital for development
- Women are best teachers; women are compromising, compassionate, caring and are surely the best partners to men.
- Women always tend to seek a compromise so that society can move forward.

All political and social achievements of Seychelles have been based on the courageous decisions that have been taken by men and supported by women.
Women (fanm) - What do we do?
A message to all women present here today; the future society will not progress without the involvement of its women.

Women’s active political participation is improving. The way forward lies in the effort of women themselves, not as individuals, but acting collectively.

So women:
• Be a leader!
• Lead and inspire people
• Lead to represent marginalized voices
• Lead to change perceptions
• Lead to change old ways
• Lead to adapt
• Lead to understand and be understood
• The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant.
• Remember, if your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank you for your attention and to always remember that, ‘behind all great men there was a woman’ and do also remember that if we are to release the potential of all women, we will have as many great women leaders as men. Like Mahatma Ghandi said, “give a woman education and you educate a village”.

I thank you all. God Bless You.