

CHIEF JUSTICE SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF THE RE-OPENING OF THE SUPREME COURT, 2026

12 January 2026

Welcome and Introduction

Vice President of the Republic, Mr. Sebastien Pillay and his wife Mrs. Lina Pillay; Speaker of the National Assembly; President of the Court of Appeal; Minister of Homeland, Security and Civil Affairs; Court of Appeal Justices; fellow Supreme Court Judges; Honorable Attorney General; Commissioner of Police; Leader of Government Business in the National Assembly; Chairman of the Constitutional Appointments Authority; Commissioner of the Anti-Corruption Commission; Chairman of the Human Rights Commission; Ombudsman; Chairman of the PSAB; Director of the Seychelles Law Commission; Representatives of the Catholic Church;

Representatives of the Anglican Church; Master of the High Court; Magistrates; Register; distinguished guests; Chairman of the Bar Association; Attorneys-at-Law; State Attorney's; representatives of various faiths present; Judicial staff; members of the media; and the Seychellois people who are following us on social media and on the television.

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Today once again we have gathered for the opening of the Supreme Court for its judicial year of 2026. I thank you for your presence which demonstrates your solidarity and support for our Judicial Institution.

The democratic process

Many developments have taken place in our democratic process in Seychelles since the opening of the courts last year. In October 2025, Seychellois exercised their right to vote and participate in government, which is provided for under article 24 of our Constitution. The result of this constitutional process has brought about changes in the Executive and Legislative branches of our country, which has established a new government and the previous members of the government becoming the opposition. The Judiciary is satisfied in its entirety with the way in which this process has taken place peacefully and without violence, which is a sign of the maturity of our democracy and the evolution of our political class and democracy. It is clear to all of us that this system of democratic governance is created by our Constitution and it is the only system which brings stability and prosperity to our nation.

I note that for a period of time in October last year, the Judiciary was the only branch of government that was fully assuming its Constitutional function. At this time the National Assembly was dissolved for elections and after the elections, when its members had not yet been sworn in. During this time there was also an outgoing President with the newly elected President, who was operating in a transition period, before the new President was sworn in. I am proud to see that during this period where the Constitution leaves us as the only branch with all its integral powers, we have done our job well with dignity and professionalism. Where at all times the Judiciary was ready to intervene in our legal and Constitutional framework to ensure

that this period passes well, in order, justice and peace. I thank all my colleagues for exercising their duties in a noble manner during this time.

Judicial Credibility

As we do every year, this year I will take the opportunity to talk more about the Judiciary's relationship with the public. In a small country like ours the impact of our decisions as a Judge or Magistrate has great consequences. The consequences of our judgment are felt directly in a short period of time by our entire population. A few hours after we make decisions, most people know what has happened and who the person is that was impacted, either in a positive or negative way. A person who is either a friend; family; neighbor or an acquaintance. This is how quickly our decision affects our citizens in its vast majority and in a personal way. Usually a decision by the Court has a winning party and a losing party because justice rarely offers a win - win solution. This situation is normally one that can bring grief, drunkenness and frustration for some and joy and elation for others. Yet on the other hand in its full sense of justice, for the Judiciary and the legal system in general, with this judgment, justice has been done. But what we see more frequently is that those who have lost their case, use all means, including social media to abuse the Judge and the Judiciary in general and undermine our credibility, not with a fair comment but with the aim of denigrating and damaging our integrity as a Constitutional institution. Let me tell you that the way justice works, it has always been like this and it will always be like this. There is no other way, go to any country in the world you will

see, there is always a loser and a winner. Instead of trying to denigrate the person who made the decision let's try to find out the reasoning behind the decision, let's have a debate about it and not make a debate about who made the decision.

The Judiciary sincerely believes in freedom of expression, and that we need to be able to enter into a debate on any issue including a court's decision. But we also need to show our maturity as people and let us try to bring our debate to a level where it gives us the opportunity to review our decision either at the level of evidence or on a point of law. On this note I thank my colleagues for exercising their office with dignity, pride, and great moderation in these difficult conditions. Their courage and patience are the subject of admiration by a large portion of our population.

In saying this, maintaining a high level of integrity in our institutions, it is important for us to gain public trust, something that we need for our Constitutional credibility. We need to do more to improve our credibility. It is with this in mind that we have decided that the judicial theme for 2026 will be '*Upholding the Rule of Law with integrity.*' Under this theme there will be several initiatives that will be taken, including:

1. Continuous training for Judicial Officers on judicial ethics and integrity to help maintain a high standard of conduct.
2. Re-evaluate the Code of Judicial Conduct that has been in place for several years to ensure that it is in line with the high standard of conduct expected from Judicial Officers.

3. Demonstrate greater commitment to publish our decisions in a more timely way so that people will be able to understand the reasoning of our decisions and ensure the effective administration of justice.

Among other measures: last year's events and activities

Last year the theme we chose was: '*Justice for all: a shared responsibility.*' Under this slogan we have managed to put in place several projects and programs with the aim of democratizing the justice system:

1. We integrated more technology into the judicial system to help our system delivery with the aim of raising standards, this is with the introduction of a platform where legal submissions can be made online in the Supreme Court and Magistrates Court, and over time by the Court of Appeal.
2. We have introduced a speech to text application where all our court testimony can now be interpreted and written down automatically as opposed to a court reporter writing proceedings manually. This creates more space for our officers to focus on editing documents and to make the court proceedings faster and more efficient.
3. Key appointments have been made, where the Chief Magistrate was promoted to Master of the Supreme Court and the Senior Magistrate was promoted to the position of Chief Magistrate. The appointment of two female magistrates has also strengthened our policy to increase gender equity in judicial leadership. Here we note that it is now an established policy that the judiciary promotes its officers in a system based off of merit

and internal promotion, which means that with experience and time, young Magistrates can form a legitimate expectation that they can reach a higher position in our judicial system.

4. Significant investment was made in the training of judicial and administrative officers, including specialized training in cybercrime and maritime offenses in collaboration with international organizations. Administrative staff also had the opportunity to do their Paralegal course with the aim of increasing their legal knowledge and consequently improving performance.
5. In respect of our contribution to legislative reform, the Judiciary contributed to the drafting and support of the drafting of the Children (Amendment) Bill 2025, which aims to strengthen the functioning of the Family Tribunal and to ensure that the tribunal becomes more effective in its operations.
6. Our participation in international forums, with the aim of gaining more knowledge and visibility, continued including the Conference Constitutional Jurisdictions of Africa (CJCA), where Seychelles was appointed to its Executive Committee.
7. We also drafted our Strategic Plan 2026-2030, in which we emphasized the commitment to a continuous service delivery excellence, where the Rule of Law and commitment to our partners remains our fundamental priority.
8. The Court of Appeal has cleared its historic backlog, which clearly demonstrates a commitment to the efficient delivery of justice. The Supreme Court is also committed to the process of

making this a reality by introducing a more efficient case management systems.

9. The judiciary also introduced a new centralized diary system with the aim of improving the management of case files in order to speed up the court process and maintain a high standard of delivery of justice.

10. The judiciary recognized staff who have long service and who have engaged in continuous professional development. Emphasis has been placed on supporting a work environment that promotes good mental health and professional development amongst staff.

11. Similarly, with the support of the Government, last year the Judiciary appointed a Supreme Court Judge to hear cases of a Commercial nature only. We hope that this will greatly assist to accelerate cases involving the business sector with the consequence of creating a better business environment and to assist in the ease of doing business in Seychelles. This is also a component of the new Mediation Court, which will be used as a tool to fast track proceedings.

12. With the gas attack on the Palais de Justice, for our own safety and the safety of people who depend on our services, we increased our security system in 2024 to avoid these threats. Due to the fact that these threats have subsided we have taken the decision to reduce some of these measures at present.

13. All of the above, and more, have been highlighted in our Annual Report 2026, which has just been published.

Statistics

The following is a statistical summary of cases across different courts in Seychelles for the period ending 30 November 2025. For a more detailed perspective you can refer to the Judicial Annual Report for 2025, which has already been published;

1. Court of Appeal: Started the 2025 year with 19 civil cases registered 49 new cases, completed 43,
2. Supreme Court: Started the 2025 year with 798 civil cases, registered 895, completed 842 and is left with 863 pending cases. In criminal cases, it has started with 191, registered 158, and completed 133, with 216 pending.
3. Constitutional Court: Started 2025 with 9 cases, registered 15, and completed 9, with 15 pending. This compares to 4 cases which were registered in 2024.
4. Magistrate's Court: Started 2025 with 1462 criminal cases, registered 2684, completed 2797, and has 1349 pending. In civil cases, it started with 189, registered 216, and completed 212, with 193 pending.
5. Employment Tribunal: Started 2025 with 16 criminal cases, registered 13, and completed 14, with 15 pending. In civil cases, it has started with 174, registered 140, and completed 160, with 154 pending.
6. Family Court: Started 2025 with 702 cases, registered 1692, completed 1665, and left 858 pending.

7. Fair Trade Tribunal: Started 2025 with 33 civil cases, registered 51, and completed 43, with 41 pending.

These statistics in general show that while some courts are managing their cases efficiently, others are facing certain backlogs. Strategies have been implemented to improve capacity and manage pending cases, with the needed to maintain efficiency.

Theme for Judicial Year 2026

Today's occasion is not merely a ceremonial event, it also represents a renewal of our collective commitment to upholding the principles of justice that are fundamental to our democracy. To help us do this, as we have done in previous years, we have put our vision in a theme. This year we have chosen the theme: *'Upholding the Rule of Law with integrity'* which resonates deeply with our mission as guardians of the rule of law. Our ongoing and future commitments based on this theme are as follows:

1. We will continue our efforts to strengthen technology to improve and increase access to Justice.
2. We will develop and modernize our Legal Aid system to ensure that those who deserve this legal service receive one at a high level, while the lawyers who provide this service receive the recognition that goes with this service. There is the need for a revision of the Legal Aid Act, so that those who really require access to free or more affordable legal representation will have access to this service.

3. Establishment of partnerships with civil society organizations.

4. Judicial training and capacity building in all judicial frameworks, whether in official or administrative frameworks. JUCOS recommended that our Legal College must establish a legislative framework to function fully. As such, the Judiciary will engage with the government to ensure that this happens. On the part of our administrative and technical staff, we wish that the Paralegal course that we have established with Unisey in 2025, continues so that all our staff acquire the basic legal skills and as a result are able to do their job more effectively.

5. To promote the understanding of legal rights and responsibilities among citizens, we will continue to conduct public and community awareness campaigns. These initiatives include workshops, seminars, and information distributed through various media platforms. By educating the public on their rights under the law, the Judiciary promotes a culture of accountability and encourages individuals to seek justice.

6. As I mentioned earlier, Alternative Deputy Resolution (ADR) or alternative legal systems for resolving disputes are mechanisms for resolving legal problems that need to be known by the general public. This year, we again intend to explore the possibility of including it in our legal procedures. Traditional legal procedures can often be complicated, lengthy, and inaccessible to many individuals seeking resolution of their problems. In this context, we need to emphasize the importance of reforming these procedures to strengthen access to justice.

Lawyer's Admissions

Last year there were 4 Lawyers who were admitted to practice in Seychelles; there were 2 Notaries, 2 State Counsel and 2 Prosecutors. Lawyers are officers of the Court and therefore they are disciplined by the Supreme Court. For this year there have been 23 complaints against lawyers that have been heard before the Judicial Council for Legal Practitioners (JCLP), which is the body that disciplines lawyers. After a complaint has been made against a lawyer, it is the Council, which is comprised by a panel of Judges, which hears the case of both parties, before a decision is taken. Last year the Supreme Court instituted disciplinary action against lawyers and 4 lawyers had to pay different fines for different disciplinary offenses. Currently there are 7 pending complaints which were filed and are still being heard. We expect a high standard of conduct by all lawyers and we will continue to take the necessary action against these cases of misconduct. I also congratulate all lawyers who maintain a high ethical value of their profession.

Capital projects

Last year we were able to complete a new archive area in the empty space upstairs in the attic of the Palais des Justice and also completed new office spaces in that area.

We are committed to reopen the La Digue Magistrate's Court this year and to start a major renovation phase on the Palais des Justice, which will include rebuilding our security fencing, but the space for this remains limited.

In July 2025, we made an immediate decision to move the Anse Royale Magistrates court to a new location due to major deterioration of the old quarters next to the Police Station. Currently the new location is not ideal and we once again ask the Government to give us the space and resources to build a modern Magistrates Court in Anse Royale.

The Magistrate's Court building at Il du Port is facing many structural problems and in 2025 we have been able to establish the origin of these problems and determined that resources are put in place to address these problems once and for all.

Financial Autonomy

I was pleased to hear that the President of the Republic welcomes the idea of financial autonomy for the independent arms of government in his State of the Nation Address, last year. He has also requested that the National Assembly submit to the Cabinet of Ministers a Bill on the financial autonomy of the legislative branch. The National Assembly and the Judiciary have jointly campaigned for their financial autonomy in the past and the Judiciary also announces its intention to also present a similar bill on this issue. The adoption of these bills will go a long way towards safeguarding the independence of the two autonomous branches of government of our country.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as we gather today to open the judicial year of 2026 under the theme '*upholding the Rule of Law with integrity*' it is essential that we reflect on the principles and values that frame our legal and judicial system. This creates a society where

the law is above all people and is the basis of a democratic society, it is a principle that ensures that any person, whether regardless of his gender or status is subject to and protected by the law. It is our duty as Judicial Officers to protect this principle and safeguard the rights of individuals and maintain the balance of justice. It is also our Constitutional duty to ensure that there is no interference by the Executive and Legislature in our judicial process. On the integrity side, it is not simply a trait but a pillar of our profession. It obliges us to act with a high moral and ethical standard, and to act transparently in what we do, and to be accountable to the public we serve. In an era when trust in the various state institutions is important, it is our integrity that will give public confidence to the judiciary. We need to make sure that our judgment is not just fair, but that it is perceived as fair and in doing so, we reinforce the notion that justice is not just done but is seen to be done and that it is not just an ideal but a tangible reality.

This year, we will continue to face the challenge of adapting to a world that is facing rapid change in all sectors. At the same time as we improve access to justice, it is important that we use technology and innovation to remove barriers to those who need access to the Court and seek recourse. We also need to remain vigilant against corruption and impartiality by creating an environment where everyone's voice is heard and where all cases are heard in a fair manner. It is also important that we engage with our community, creating initiatives that will bring us closer to them, on the subject of education; reform and provision of best practices in the Judiciary. Let us stand united in our vision to maintain the Rule of Law with a high standard of integrity, to

ensure that justice is not only done but seen to be done. Together, we can create a more just and equitable Seychelles, where the notion of a country governed by the law prevails, where all individuals have faith in a system of justice that is only based on a high level of integrity.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all stakeholders in the justice system; Judges, Magistrates, Lawyers, Court staff, various law enforcement agencies, including the police; media and civil society organizations; and the other two branches of government for their support. Your contributions are important to ensure that we uphold justice in an effective, fair and transparent manner. I also express my appreciation for our presence in this ceremony, and the presence of the distinguished guests. Thank you for members of the churches, Police brass band; the reopening committee; the choir; and everyone who contributed to making the ceremony a success.

I wish everyone a happy new year 2026, may God continue to bless you all and our country Seychelles

Thank you.

The Honorable Chief Justice