

An enduring partnership

By **H.E. LINDSAY SKOLL**

BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER TO SEYCHELLES



LINDSAY SKOLL joined the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 1996, after three years working for the Japanese Ministry of Education. She has a background in international public and cultural relations and foreign languages. Her numerous policy roles within the FCO encompass Asia, the Middle East and Africa, covering issues as diverse as security policy to climate security. She previously served in Pyongyang and was accredited as High Commissioner to the Republic of Seychelles on 2 August 2012.

Seychelles is a great example of a small country thinking big. In less than 40 years since independence, Seychelles has unarguably become the jewel in Africa's crown. Its deep blue oceans contain rich fish stocks while promising potentially significant hydrocarbon reserves. Its white beaches are rightly famous the world over for their breathtaking beauty and touristic appeal. But Seychelles is so much more than its oceans and beaches.

It is a country which has shown - and continues to show - real spirit and ambition. It pulled itself up from near financial ruin in 2008 through tough economic reforms and sheer hard work. It is a fiercely proud island nation where hospitality is the way of life. And it is a country I am proud to call home.

Today, Seychelles works closely with the UK not as a former colony, but as a genuine and valued partner. When Somali piracy threatened the region, it was Seychelles who first stood up to the threat. The UK has been with Seychelles every step of the way. Together the UK and Seychelles opened the Regional Anti-Piracy Prosecutions and Intelligence Coordination Centre (RAPPICC; now REFLECS3) in February 2012, a Victoria-based centre of excellence for maritime security.

The UK-Seychelles partnership is an all-embracing one, covering the widest possible spectrum of cooperation. We encourage Seychelles' forward-thinking agenda on issues as diverse as social renaissance, the Blue Economy and civil society. The High Commission team supports Seychelles across the Seychelles' criminal justice system, including the provision of expert UK prosecutors, police trainers, prison staff, specialist dog units and bespoke piracy court.

I am particularly proud of the innovative partnership work we did to promote disability sport and access in Seychelles. The British High Commission helped Seychelles become the first country to accede to the International Paralympics Association within a year of London 2012; a terrific achievement.

Equally, the High Commission is fully engaged in many aspects of Seychelles' vibrant society. This engagement is built on a warm, shared history and strong democratic values. Seychelles is increasingly vocal on international issues that affect us all. Its bid for a seat on the UNSC in 2017 is symbolic of its maturity, global reach and forward-looking responsibility. Equally, far from resting on our historic links, we

are now squarely focused on future cooperation and exciting opportunities for UK-Seychelles businesses.

Seychelles is right to be ambitious. In my meetings with President Michel and his hugely capable Ministerial team I am constantly impressed by the energy and drive to see Seychelles develop further and play an ever greater role on the world stage.

Central to this ambition is the growth of Seychelles' economy. Over the previous 35 years, opportunities in tourism and fisheries were understandably its central pillars. Recent political will and vision to further extend and diversify the economy now opens the door to new drivers of growth. Seychelles is a country of huge geostrategic importance, bridging Africa and Asia, and hosting a truly diverse and well educated population. Many of whom I am proud to say have strong links to, and were educated in the UK.

British companies and experts are leading Seychelles' reenergised hydrocarbons exploration. I applaud Seychelles' authorities for the regulatory frameworks introduced to ensure that this develops as a transparent, equitable partnership. And I am proud that the UK is the leader in developing business partnerships based on collaboration, openness, and mutual benefit.

The UK wants to promote business in tandem with Seychelles because we understand that the private sector is the engine of economic growth, that business brings investment, innovation and tax revenues to a country, and that it provides jobs and economic opportunities for the communities in which it operates. Increasing trade, tax and transparency was a key focus for the UK Presidency of the G8 in 2013. This is not only good for Seychelles as it further develops a rules-based and transparent system; it benefits Britain too by creating credible new markets for British businesses to invest in.

The government of Seychelles is clear in its intent to attract the right, responsible commercial partners to help realise the potential of their natural, human and economic resources. I believe that British companies can be a force for good in Seychelles. The UK has some of the strongest corporate governance structures in the world and unrivalled diplomatic and commercial networks. At the British High Commission we are ready to use our contacts, experience and knowledge of what works on the ground to support prosperity for Seychelles and the UK. I hope you'll join us on this exciting journey.

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