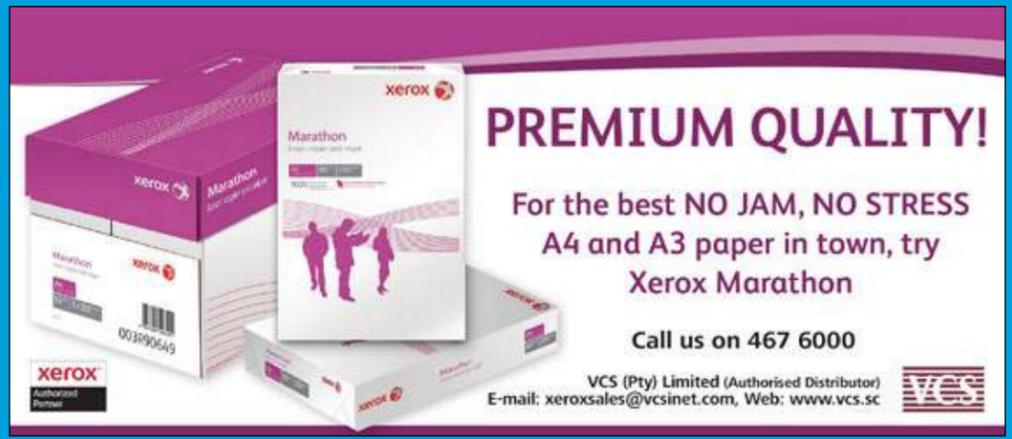


TODAY

in Seychelles

Monday 3 February, 2025

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“Seychelles has a moral obligation to ensure the IOC remains strong and effective”



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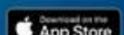
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Big interview with Ralph Agrippine

“Seychelles has a moral obligation to ensure the IOC remains strong and effective”

Mr. Ralph Agrippine is a seasoned diplomat with over a decade of experience, having served in key international roles, including Chargé d’Affaires in Addis Ababa and Paris. Currently, as Seychelles’ Permanent Liaison Officer for the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), he plays a pivotal role in shaping regional cooperation, diplomacy, and policy decisions.

by J. Marie

Can you share with us your journey into diplomacy and what inspired you to pursue a career in international relations?

My path into diplomacy wasn’t exactly planned. After finishing my A-Levels as part of the first group at Seychelles Institute of Technology (SIT), my first job was as an intern at the Department of Foreign Affairs under the President’s Office at the National House. I was there for a short time before moving into teaching, my first profession. Later, I pursued further studies and worked in journalism and politics before returning to diplomacy.

I’ve now been in diplomacy for 12 years. I started as a Ministerial Attaché under Minister (Jean-Paul) Adam, progressed to Director General, and later worked overseas as Principal Counsellor, a role I still hold today. What drew me to diplomacy was that it combined many of my skills—writing, public speaking, and navigating political and economic discussions. Diplomats must be adaptable and multilingual—in my case, English and French.

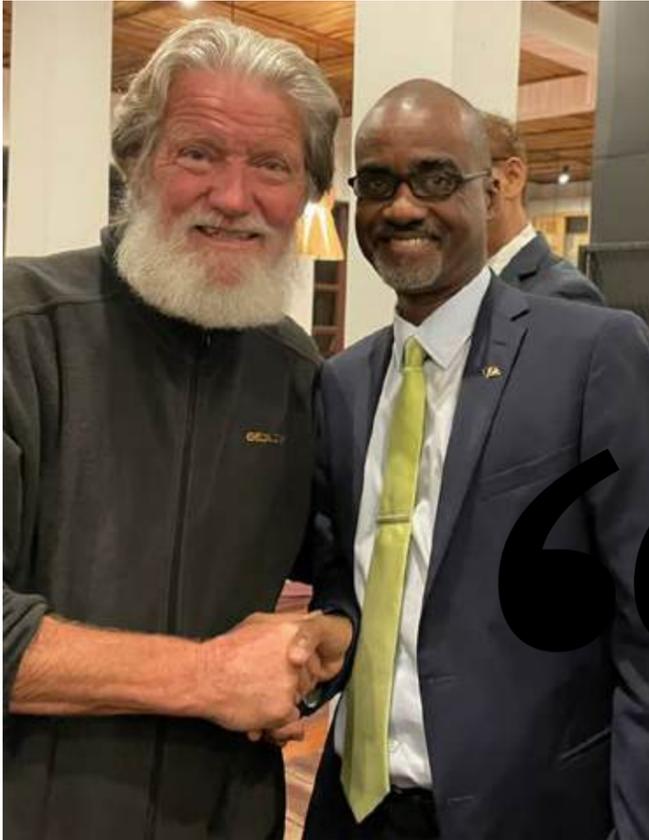
In the past, diplomacy was rhetoric-focused, but today, it demands technical expertise. My training in economics, law, management, and sustainable development gave me a solid foundation. So when the opportunity arose, I saw it as a way to merge my experiences and apply them meaningfully. It wasn’t my original plan, but in hindsight, it feels like a natural progression of my career.

What has been the most rewarding or challenging aspect of your career in diplomacy so far?

The most rewarding and challenging moments in my career have come in different forms. One of the most difficult periods was my time as Chargé d’Affaires in Addis Ababa. There was a period when attacks on foreigners, particularly Africans, had escalated, and we even had a contingency plan to airlift us to Kenya if the situation worsened. I was responsible for the embassy and ensuring our people’s safety. I recall a diplomat being attacked at the airport, and every time we walked into the city, there was a risk of being targeted.

Another challenge was when Seychelles withdrew the candidacy of Mr. Alain St. Ange. As head of the Addis embassy, I had to navigate a complex diplomatic situation, consulting the capital while ensuring Seychelles’ position was effectively communicated.

Paris had its own challenges.



• With Father Pedro Opeka, founder of the association ‘Akamasoa’ which is combatting poverty in Madagascar

When Minister Radeconde left, I took over as Chargé d’Affaires during COVID-19, a time of uncertainty. Paris was eerily empty, and at one point, we weren’t sure the embassy could remain open due to funding constraints in Seychelles.

On the rewarding side, my time at UNESCO stands out. When Morocco rejoined the African Union, Seychelles played a role in bridging political differences. Another major moment was when ‘Moutya’ was recognised as part of UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, a proud milestone for our culture. Similarly, when the International Institute for Capacity Development (IECD) became a UNESCO Category Two Centre, it highlighted Seychelles’ role in education and development.

As the Permanent Liaison Officer for the IOC, what are your primary responsibilities, and how do they align with Seychelles’ interests in the region?

My role is straightforward—I serve as the bridge between Seychelles and the IOC, ensuring effective communication and collaboration. Any IOC matters concerning Seychelles go through me, and any Seychelles-related positions or concerns are relayed through me to the IOC.

What makes the IOC unique is that it is not a political organisation but a regional, project-based body focused on international co-

operation. At any given time, the IOC manages around a dozen projects spanning maritime security, health, environmental sustainability, and education. My responsibility is to ensure Seychelles is actively engaged and benefits fully from these initiatives.

A major aspect of my job is preparing Seychelles’ position for the Council of Ministers, the IOC’s main decision-making body. Minister (Sylvestre) Radeconde represents Seychelles in these meetings, and my role is to advise him on policy matters by reviewing documents, analysing key arguments, and condensing information into clear recommendations.

Beyond policymaking, I also coordinate Seychelles’ national focal points, ensuring that our technical teams actively contribute to the IOC’s ongoing projects. Fortunately, Seychelles has dedicated and highly skilled professionals working in these areas, making coordination smoother.

The IOC recently turned 40 and is undergoing a major transformation. Traditionally, it relied on external funding from the European Union, the French Development Agency (AFD), and other donors. Now, the goal is to transition into a self-funded regional organisation by securing its own resources.

This shift is significant, and my role is to ensure Seychelles remains at the forefront of this transformation. In regional bodies like the IOC, some countries lead,

while others align to push progress forward. Seychelles, as one of the three founding members, has a moral obligation to ensure the IOC remains strong and effective.

The agreement establishing the IOC was signed in Seychelles, making it imperative for us to play an active role in shaping its future direction and ensuring it serves the best interests of the region.

For me, my job is to ensure that this moral obligation translates into practical action—to make sure that we are engaged, proactive, and influential in shaping the IOC’s future.

artistic ties.

With UNESCO’s recognition of artists’ status and the IOC’s support for creative industries, Seychelles is laying a strong foundation for a thriving cultural economy. The timing for these initiatives couldn’t be better.

You’ve served in various capacities. How have these experiences shaped your approach to diplomacy?

My time in Addis Ababa and Paris played a significant role in shaping my diplomatic approach. I

and global level—a skill that remains invaluable today.

Given the recent attacks on vessels in the Red Sea and their impact on global trade, what measures is Seychelles taking to ensure the security of its maritime routes?

There’s an interesting programme under the IOC called MAZE, and I was fortunate to have been involved in it. Before my postings in Addis Ababa and Paris, I served as Director of the Anti-Piracy Unit of the IOC, which was based in Seychelles. That role shaped my understanding of maritime security, which, at the time, was primarily focused on combatting piracy.

Back then, we were in a reactionary phase, responding to piracy attacks as they occurred. However, we soon realised that piracy was just one symptom of a much bigger issue. I still remember something that was said by the Director General of DG MARE from the European Union—he called piracy a blessing in disguise. Not because piracy itself was something positive, but because it forced us to open our eyes to the wider threats facing our seas.

We realised that criminal networks evolve. Today, they might be pirates, but tomorrow they could shift into trafficking—whether it’s people, drugs, or even environmental goods like endangered turtles. They could move into Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, which is a multi-billion-dollar industry. The common denominator is organised crime—they follow the money.

This led us to establish a regional maritime security architecture designed to tackle all maritime threats, not just piracy. Through this structure, we set up two key centres—one in Seychelles and another in Madagascar—which allowed us to respond quickly and effectively to emerging threats.

One of the most important aspects of maritime security is information sharing. Seychelles is well positioned in this regard, with an office in Bahrain that plays a crucial role in the global maritime security network. The ability to quickly collect, process, and disseminate intelligence makes all the difference in tackling threats, whether it’s an armed robbery at sea, trafficking, or environmental crimes.

One thing that people often overlook is that maritime security is a public good. It’s not just about protecting Seychelles or the Indian Ocean—it’s about contributing to global stability. Keeping the seas

(continued on page 5)

Diplomacy is about compromise and collaboration

Recently, there have been discussions among IOC members about enhancing cultural and creative industries. How will Seychelles benefit from these initiatives?

There have been ongoing discussions on how to develop and strengthen Seychelles’ creative and cultural industries. This is an exciting area of growth, and as a diplomat, I’ve seen that a multidisciplinary approach is essential.

During my time in Paris, I worked closely with UNESCO and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF). UNESCO places great emphasis on culture, and Seychelles was the first country to collaborate with them on formalising the status of artists. Mauritius is working on it too, though their law has yet to pass.

The concept is simple: being an artist is a profession, just like any other. Artists contribute economically and culturally and should receive legal recognition. Seychelles is actively working on a law to formalise their professional status.

This is where the IOC plays a role. The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) sector is not just about culture but about the business of culture. It is often referred to as the orange economy, similar to the blue economy for oceans and the purple economy for health.

The ICC project (Industry, Culture, and Creative) under the IOC aligns with Seychelles’ goals. A key initiative is artistic mobility, allowing Seychellois artists to travel, collaborate, and gain international exposure.

For instance, there is a planned cultural exchange with Mozambique for the Biennial of the Arts, which strengthens historical and

spent one year in Addis and four in Paris, and while both experiences were valuable, they were vastly different.

In Addis, I operated within a framework of 53 African nations, whereas at UNESCO in Paris, the scale was much larger. UNESCO is the largest UN agency, with more member states than the UN itself, as it includes associate members. While its focus is on culture, science, education, and information, it also serves as a platform for global diplomacy.

Working at UNESCO provided invaluable exposure to multilateral cooperation, where I learned how to form alliances, build consensus, and navigate international negotiations.

As a diplomat, you quickly realise that you cannot work alone. Seychelles’ position on an issue doesn’t carry weight independently among 195 countries, so we must align with groups—in my case, the Africa Group. Seychelles had a strong voice at UNESCO because Africa is a priority area, and small island developing states (SIDS) are also a key focus. Being both African and a small island state gave us a dual advantage in discussions.

One of my most valuable experiences at UNESCO was chairing the Small Island States Group. This involved leading discussions, coordinating positions, and working with diverse nations to find common ground on key issues.

Additionally, I was highly engaged in the Eastern African Group, which helped me balance Seychelles’ role as both an African nation and an island state.

Diplomacy is about compromise and collaboration. While in Paris, my role was not about resolving conflicts but about building common positions at both the regional

SEYCHELLES WEATHER FORECAST

<p>Temperature 28°-24°</p>	<p>Wind N 11 mph</p>	<p>Sunrise 6:22 am</p>	<p>Sunset 6:41 pm</p>	<p>UV Index 12</p>	<p>Humidity 79%</p>	<p>Moon Phase Waxing Crescent</p>	<p>Tides Low 1:52am (0.0m) HIGH 07:46am (2.0m) Low 14:05pm (-0.1m) HIGH 20:13pm (2.1m)</p>	<p>Solunar Activity High</p>
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Opinion

Seychelles and its Neighbouring Islands: A Comprehensive Overview of the Kerry Doctrine

by Dr. Srimal Fernando

On August 14, 2015, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry recognised the enduring legacies of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, asserting that India stands as a symbol of hope for the global community. He remarked that since its independence in 1947, India has exemplified resilience as a democracy, particularly in its efforts against terrorism.

Kerry's tenure as Secretary of State is characterised by a strong commitment to diplomacy, climate change initiatives, and fostering global collaboration. His policies not only shaped U.S. foreign relations during a critical period but also laid the groundwork for addressing future global challenges. As the world grapples with intricate issues such as climate change and security, Kerry's influence remains pertinent. The influence of John Kerry, former U.S. Secretary of State, on American foreign policy has been profound, especially regarding the Indian Ocean region and its islands. This ocean is essential for international trade and has gained significance in global affairs due to its strategic importance and the complex political dynamics of its island nations.

Kerry's engagement with India was especially critical, as he highlighted the necessity of strengthening U.S.-India relations as a fundamental aspect of American policy in Asia. A prominent figure in this context is John Kerry, who served from 2013 to 2017 under President Barack Obama. His tenure was marked by a strong focus on international cooperation, tackling climate change, and improving U.S. relations with countries in South Asia and

the Indian Ocean region, including India, Mauritius, the Seychelles, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Réunion. John Kerry's role as Secretary of State has significantly influenced American foreign policy in recent times. His dedication to diplomatic efforts, particularly through the Iran nuclear agreement and his active involvement in climate initiatives, highlighted the multifaceted nature of international relations. His legacy underscores the critical role of diplomacy in confronting international issues and promoting cooperation among nations.

Kerry Doctrine in Foreign Policy US and Seychelles

The changing dynamics of the relationship between the United States and the Seychelles underscore a notable transformation in American foreign policy, emphasising increased engagement in the Indian Ocean area. By prioritising maritime security, climate change, and economic development, both countries are establishing a strong partnership. Ongoing discussions and collaborative efforts will be crucial in tackling mutual challenges, thereby safeguarding not only the security and prosperity of the Seychelles but also promoting stability throughout the wider region. The former U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, has played a crucial role in shaping the foreign policy of the United States, especially regarding the Indian Ocean region. His involvement has highlighted the importance of U.S. partnerships in promoting both security and prosperity. The recent commitment to deepen ties with nations in this area indicates a significant shift in U.S. foreign policy, showcasing a more active engagement in a region deemed strategically important.

UniSey and the Department of Tourism and Cultural Heritage

The year 2025 is expected to mark a significant turning point for the Seychelles, an alluring archipelago in the Indian Ocean, celebrated for its magnificent landscapes and vibrant cultural history. The University of Seychelles plays a key role in this initiative by linking education with the tourism sector. By delivering quality education and training, UniSey aims to empower its students to become forward-thinking leaders in tourism. Real-world experiences are integral to the curriculum designed for future generations. The partnership between UniSey and the Department of Tourism and Cultural Heritage is crucial in enhancing the

educational framework that supports the tourism industry. The university is recognised for its exemplary tourism studies, offering a Bachelor of Science Honours degree in Travel, Tourism, and Economics (BTTE) through its Department of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, thus preparing students with the vital skills for a successful career.

Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and the Maldives.

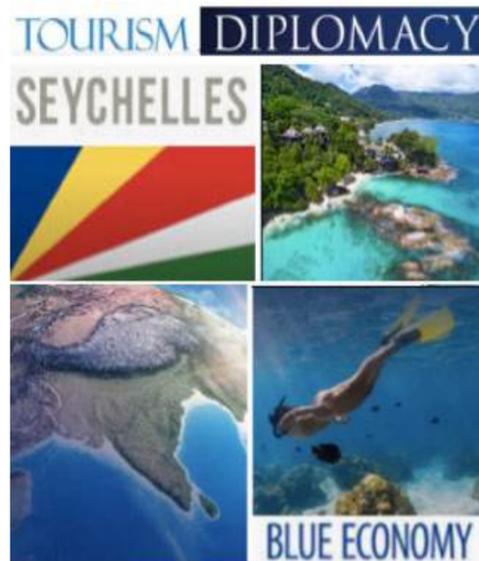
John Kerry's engagement in Sri Lanka and the enduring connections with Mauritius and the Maldives illustrate a strategic framework adopted by the United States in the Indian Ocean territory.

The Legacy of John Kerry

The legacy of John Kerry in the realm of foreign policy is defined by his focus on environmental matters, diplomatic efforts, and a commitment to multilateralism. His work during the Obama administration laid the groundwork for future initiatives, especially regarding climate change and international cooperation. In light of the complex challenges that persist globally, Kerry's emphasis on collaboration and innovative strategies remains vital in addressing the critical issues of our time.

About the author:

Dr. Srimal Fernando is a Senior Lecturer, Department of Tourism and Cultural Heritage at the University of Seychelles. Dr. Fernando is the author of Politics, Economics and Connectivity: In Search of the South Asian Union and holds a PhD in International Affairs. (email srimal.fernando@unisey.ac.sc)



“Seychelles has a moral obligation to ensure the IOC remains strong and effective”

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safe benefits everyone, from local fishing communities to international shipping and trade networks.

How is Seychelles collaborating with neighbouring countries to address the challenges posed by maritime threats in the Red Sea and the Western Indian Ocean?

I wouldn't call myself an expert, but based on my time as Director of the Anti-Piracy Unit, I can share some insights. People often refer to five oceans, but in maritime security, we see it as one interconnected ocean. A security issue in the Pacific or Red Sea can directly affect Seychelles—if a ship carrying essential goods is impacted, the problem is no longer regional but personal.

Seychelles, at the heart of the Indian Ocean, has the experience and infrastructure to play an active role in regional maritime security. Having led the fight against piracy, we understand maritime threats. Unlike larger nations, we don't project military power globally, but we contribute through knowledge, experience, and strategic cooperation.

Our approach works in layers—starting with sub-regional efforts, then expanding to the wider Indian Ocean, and ultimately contributing to global security. A key achievement is bringing together countries with competing geopolitical interests. Take China, India, and the United States—often seen

as rivals. Yet, in maritime security, we've managed to get them to collaborate towards a shared goal.

By focusing on common security concerns, Seychelles has helped defuse tensions in this area. When securing the seas, political differences don't matter—what matters is that the ocean remains safe for everyone.

Considering Seychelles' vulnerabilities due to limited economic diversification, what strategies are being implemented to enhance economic resilience?

One of the key priorities in Seychelles' foreign policy is advocating for the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI). Everywhere we go, we make the case that SIDS like Seychelles should have better access to international finance on concessional terms.

The reason is simple—we are highly vulnerable to climate change. While Seychelles has achieved significant development, we shouldn't be penalised for our progress. The challenges we face—rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and economic vulnerabilities—mean we still require financial support to mitigate these risks.

Now, let's be clear: Seychelles isn't asking for handouts. We are not saying we want aid or free money. We are ready to borrow, but it must be under fairer terms that take our unique vulnerabilities into account.

We do not contribute significantly to global carbon emissions,

yet we suffer the consequences of climate change. That's why we are making a legitimate plea to the international community—let us access financing to address these challenges.

With better financing options, we can strengthen our resilience, not just in recovering from climate-related damage, but also in diversifying our economy and creating a more sustainable economic base.

This is why our fight for the MVI is so important. If adopted by global financial institutions, it would be a powerful tool for small islands like Seychelles in securing development funding. It would allow us to invest in climate adaptation, strengthen key industries, and ensure long-term economic stability.

Seychelles has been at the forefront of this movement, and progress has already been made. The moment this index is widely accepted, it will become an essential tool in our push for stronger, fairer economic development.

What are your key objectives in strengthening Seychelles' diplomatic relations, both within the Indian Ocean region and globally?

Seychelles, a small country with big ambitions, recognises that regional and international cooperation is essential due to natural constraints like population, resources, and economic capacity.

A prime example is maritime security. Through programmes like MAZE and the Indian Ocean maritime security architecture, Sey-

chelles has enhanced its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) monitoring. The refund mechanism allows the Coast Guard to increase patrols, reinforcing our security efforts.

IUU fishing is another pressing issue. Seychelles, one of the most affected countries, benefits significantly from the Pay-as-Pay programme, with most patrols taking place within our EEZ. Next month, Seychelles will host the third regional ministerial meeting on IUU fishing, reinforcing our leadership.

Internationally, Seychelles amplifies its voice through organisa-

tions like the African Union (AU) and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). Within these coalitions, we multiply our influence, ensuring that small nations are heard.

A prime example is the global climate change conversation. The 1.5-degree temperature target, now widely accepted, was initially advocated by Small Island States. Countries like Seychelles, Maldives, and Pacific nations led the fight to raise awareness of climate change's impact. Seychelles has proven the power of cooperation.

Through regional and international partnerships, we expand our influence, secure resources, and strengthen our ability to protect our national interests.

Do you have a final message?

Firstly, I would like to remark that diplomacy is not undertaken only by diplomats. Other government officials as well as civil society organisations also engage in diplomacy on behalf of a country. The effectiveness of Seychelles' diplomacy stems partly from the fact that the non-diplomats contributing technical inputs are professional, disciplined and well-versed in their subject matters. I have worked with officers of SDF (Seychelles Defence Forces) and Seychelles Coast Guards, officials of ministries like education, health and finance, as well as with officials from SNICHA (Seychelles National Institute of Culture, Heritage and the Arts) and CEPS (Citizens Engagement Platform Seychelles) and others. I commend them for contributing immensely to the success of Seychelles diplomacy.

Secondly, I would like to point out that diplomacy operates on a relationship between a principal and an agent. The one giving instructions is the principal while the one executing them is the agent. As a diplomat, I am blessed to have principals like Minister Radeconde and Principal Secretary Fock-Iave who have trusted me with great responsibilities and also agents like my secretary who is very professional.



• Consulting with colleagues of the IOC