

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF MADAGASCAR, MR MARC RAVALOMANANA**

The President of the Republic of Madagascar: Mr Speaker, Dr. the hon. Prime Minister, hon. Deputy Prime Minister, hon. Ministers, hon. Leader of the Opposition, hon. Members of the National Assembly, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to tell you that Madagascar is committed to rapid development. We want to see a giant leap forward. We cannot afford to crawl at a snail's pace. We have been lagging in our development for too long. Many years of socialism and bad governance have left us a poor and somewhat isolated country. But since I became President, I have begun to turn this situation around. We are now well and truly on the path to achieving our vision.

To guide the development process, we have created the Madagascar Action Plan, the MAP. The MAP is a radical plan for making a quantum leap. It outlines the specific commitments, challenges and projects that must be pursued to achieve our aim. Let me give you some examples.

We are committed to achieving a high growth economy. That means we want to attract significantly higher amounts of foreign investment and we must encourage greater entrepreneurial activity domestically. We have to become a competitive nation. In the near future, I want to see growth rates of 8-10%.

We are committed to preserving our environment. Madagascar has one of the highest biodiversity rates in the world. This must be protected. But it means changes in how rural people go about farming, and how mining companies and logging companies go about their business.

Our environment is rich with resources, but it cannot be pillaged or abused. The consequences would be too great, not only for Madagascar, but also for our fellow countries in the Indian Ocean.

We are committed to transforming our educational system. The current system is based on the old-style French model and not adapted to the demands of the 21st century. Also, not enough children are in school. But this now is changing. We are also going to create a new international university in Madagascar that is going to train and develop the brightest young people to be the leaders in the key sectors that will help us develop and gain a competitive advantage as a nation.

We are committed to building a modern and thorough infrastructure that connects all of Madagascar. I want our roads, ports, airports and telecommunications to be of international standards.

And, we are committed to the principles and practices of what I call “Responsible Governance”. Responsible Governance emphasises honesty and transparency and the importance of being accountable and achieving results.

I explain these commitments to you because I want you to see how serious we are. It is no longer business-as-usual in Madagascar. Today we talk about change, transformation, accountability and results.

I am a man of action. I have been all my life. I was an entrepreneur and created a successful business. I know the importance of having a vision, formulating strategies and mobilising resources to get things done. I try to bring this mindset and approach to governing Madagascar.

But one of my biggest challenges is to change the mindsets and habits of the Malagasy people. Our society is rural in nature and very traditional. We must change fast if we are to succeed. Part of my challenge is to help the people determine what in the culture must be preserved and what must be discarded or adapted so that we can more effectively deal with the new realities that we face.

Globalisation presents many dangers, but also tremendous opportunities. We cannot sit idly by and watch as the world advances. We must be active, dynamic, and thoughtful participants if we are to successfully deal with the threats and take advantage of the opportunities.

In order to help Madagascar develop more rapidly, I have visited many countries to observe, listen and learn. One of the countries that we can learn a lot from, is Mauritius. Your rapid growth over the past 20 years is admirable. The development of your private sector – particularly tourism and manufacturing, is truly amazing. Your successes in education and family planning are exciting models.

Throughout Africa, many neighbours have very tense relationships, but not us. The relationship between our two countries is excellent. We are proud to be your neighbour. You are always welcome in Madagascar and I know the Malagasy people are always welcome here in Mauritius.

We have a wonderful partnership as fellow members of SADC. Our two countries are together building a strong alliance to promote regional integration and to create the conditions that give us a competitive advantage in the international marketplace. A strong alliance means that we must collaborate, cooperate, communicate and co-create so that our economic and industrial strategies help us to break through the barriers that impede our advancement.

We are islands, far away from the rest of the world. We are vulnerable to the whims and fancies of the economic systems and the policies of Europe, China and the United States. Unless our partnership is strong, and unless our regional integration is solid and robust, we will always be forever at risk and could suffer in severe ways. We must be resilient, we must be proactive, and we must be strategic in order to succeed.

Our shared leadership challenges are demanding, but they are also very exciting. I want us to tackle these demanding economic, environmental and social challenges by exchanging knowledge and resources. I want our friendship to continue to flourish. I want us to succeed together, as true partners.

Thank you.

(Applause)