Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen

Today marks the World Health Day and this year the celebration is special. It is indeed special because we are having double celebrations. The first one will be celebrated under the theme Depression; let's talk and the other one under the theme Depression; Road to recovery to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the Mental Health National Recovery Week Initiative.

Both celebrations will provide the opportunity for communities across the country to join together to help support people living with mental disorders.

There is no health without mental health and therefore mental health should be treated as part of a person's overall health, and we must ensure individuals living with mental health conditions can get the treatment they need.

Have you or do you know someone with a change in mood and thoughts and with change in their eating and sleeping habits? Do you or do you know someone who had or is having trouble doing normal day-to-day activities, and sometimes you/they may feel as if life isn't worth living?

Yes, ladies and gentlemen this is what we call depression and it can affect anyone of us.

Depression is not just a passing blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be wished away. People with depression cannot merely 'pull themselves together' and get better. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months, or years. Appropriate treatment, however, can help most people with depression.

The disease is a significant contributor to the global burden of disease and affects people in all communities across the world. According to WHO today, depression is estimated to affect 350 million people. The World Mental Health Survey conducted in 17 countries found that on average about 1 in 20 people reported having an episode of depression in the previous year. Depressive disorders often start at a young age; they reduce people’s functioning and often are recurring. For these reasons,
depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide in terms of total years lost due to disability. At its worst, depression can lead to suicide. Almost 1 million lives are lost yearly due to suicide, which translates to 3000 suicide deaths every day. For every person who completes a suicide, 20 or more may attempt to end his or her life.

Our country has not been spared from this problem and its associated burden. Over the years, there has seen a gradual increase in the number of clients coming into contact with our services

We have made significant progress in the development of our mental health services and surely we have elevated the conversation about mental health. I am sure however that many people still do not get the help they need. Therefore mental illness and depression must become our top priority as it does not only affects health and well-being but also productivity and economic growth. Lost productivity due to mental health is something that our economy cannot afford.

The activities organized are to remind everyone concerned that although depression is a common and serious illness, it is treatable and help is available. It is also a call to the treatment providers, elected officials, policy makers, education leaders, health providers, and all those involved in the provision of services for our people that there is a need to ensure that there is appropriate, innovative and community based resources so that people can access help and that the response of our society is to assist and support instead of judging and pretending that mental illness does not exist. The campaign will help also reduce the myths, stigma and discrimination that surround the illness. However most importantly we need to find the will and resources to use this knowledge to transform the lives of our people.

During the week we shall also be paying special tribute to the dedicated professionals and everyday citizens who, with skills and empathy, guide people through the treatment and recovery process. Throughout the week we would like to offer messages of hope and understanding to all Seychellois and their families suffering from mental illness and addiction.

As healthcare workers we can do a lot to prevent depression and its consequences through: Creating more youth friendly clinics, encouraging health promotion in clinics and hospitals, promoting awareness of acute stress, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation.

There is a need to scale up the mental health services so as to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, endorsed at the United Nations General Assembly in 2015: Our country would also like that by 2030, to reduce by
one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.

I am certain that the on-going training in depression will improved the knowledge and skills of medical staff and the number of patients receiving treatment for depression will surely increase too. Treating depression in primary care is feasible, affordable and cost-effective.

To all school professionals I surely hope that the training will allow you to better screen for psychosocial problems in school learners. You will certainly be in a better position to refer children and adolescents with mental health disorders.

We need to work with other ministries so as to find solutions to improve legal, social and financial protection for individuals, families and communities adversely affected by depression and its consequences. The more partners involve the greater and faster the results will be. So today I want to appeal to all stakeholders in this room. We need your support and commitment to overcome this challenge. Through partnership, progress can be delivered in the most testing of circumstances.

This year double celebration, is calling on everyone to shine a light on mental illness especially depression and replace stigma with hope. Today we have the opportunity to support one another, let us renew our commitment to fight against the stigma that is still associated with mental illness. As a nation it is our duty to support all those battling with depression and any other mental illness; as the custodian of health and well being of our people, our ministry is determined to pursue every conceivable path within the confines of our resources to ensure that we continue with the modernization of the mental health services.

I am sure that with time, patience and a considerable amount of specialist support, many people will get well. Let us all here present make a pledge of solidarity and change the conversation and get the country to talk about mental health. Let all the activities organized translate into major steps towards improving the life of all those living with mental illnesses and the lives of their love ones. Remember that symptoms are not barriers to treatment, but our attitude is.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hereby officially declare the World Health Day and National Recovery Week open.

Happy celebrations

I thank you all.