Speech delivered by the Principal Secretary for Health on 17th February 2017 at the Opening of the Second Day of the Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education held at the International Conference Centre in Seychelles

Welcome! Welcome to the second day of this first International conference on Early Childhood Care and Education. I extend the same warm, luscious, welcome that the MC has extended, to all the participants present today.

The scene was set yesterday at the opening ceremony for what we would like to achieve at the end of these three conference days. We need to have shared our experiences and knowledge, focussing not so much on what we have done but on how we have been able to erect or sustain or improve structures and processes to elevate the care and well-being of our children, aged from zero to seven years. By the close of the conference we need to have learnt from each other and to have been reinvigorated by the confluence of each other’s passion and energy for ECCE.

We all recognize now that the mental and physical growth and development of children in the first years of life are as rapid and fascinating as they are complex and delicate. They must be handled with care.

Speaking from the standpoint of health, whatever we do, or fail to do, for our younger children have major consequences on their ability to live, grow, interact, learn and be healthy, stable and happy.

Even before birth, the “child-to-be” needs comprehensive and coordinated health services so as to be born alive and after being born alive, to live, grow, play, learn and be stable, healthy and happy. Even before birth, the child’s brain and body are at major risks. Health care services must be structured to mitigate those risks and so have they in Seychelles.

Universal health coverage, great efforts at optimizing clinical care, at optimizing coordination of care, at optimizing consultation between the key care actors to provide the best possible prevention and therapeutic services both in the community and in the hospital and also between the community and the hospital, have been some of the key strategic and operational objectives of the national health plan.
Henceforth recognized as a hub for ECCE, Seychelles realized very early on that any robust health system for young children must adequately address not just one or two of their needs, but all their needs. Social, economic, cultural, environmental, and technological factors determine health and leave everlasting marks on children – the younger the child, the more indelible the mark. Our efforts to influence these social determinants of health, for all children have always been a major part of the National Health Service delivery strategy.

Today’s programme is compelling. We will share a recapitulation of some of the best ECCE moments of Seychelles through a seminal video. This will be followed by a lively discussion. We will subsequently listen to and then reflect on the keynote address of the day.

In the afternoon we will shift the conversation to some of the big words in the ECCE discourse such as neuroscience, neurophysiology and brain architecture so as to be reminded again that there is indeed a solid scientific foundation guiding why we are here today and why we are all rolling the drums so hard and so persistently on ECCE. We will end the day by sharing the lessons of experience, which may or may not be, best practices, of a collection of countries.

Exciting day indeed! I present the day to you, wrapped in love from Seychelles. Welcome and thank you.