

Opening speech at the Seychelles' premiere of Captain Phillips

Welcome to the Seychelles premiere of Captain Phillips, and thank you all for participating in this event that will benefit so many through the Apostolate de la Mer & Seychelles Seafarer's Association. Greetings to Former President Sir James Mancham, Minister Joel Morgan, Chairman of the High Level Committee on Piracy, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a blessing that amongst audience members tonight are men who lived the story as former victims of piracy - those who know for a fact that piracy in the Indian Ocean is so much more than just a good plot for an action/adventure movie.

Millions of people around the world will watch, and take enjoyment from, the theatrical interpretation of the true story of the series of events that terrorized the crew of the MV Maersk Alabama in 2009.



Tonight, before we have that experience, we'll see a documentary that paints a bigger picture than one ship being invaded by one lot of Somali pirates - a bigger picture that has Seychelles right in the centre of the true drama ... in the bull's eye, as you might say.

No one in this country can claim to have escaped the ramifications of repeated attacks on the high seas in our neighbourhood, as every person in Seychelles has, in one way or another, suffered consequences. From the hit taken to the tourism industry to rises in insurance charges for anything that travels by sea, to the occasional dearth of fish - even to the three-year postponement of our chance to watch a circus perform – everyone here knows of damage done.

With the knowledge of the harm, we also know much of the reason. We know the lawlessness that is Somalia and the hopelessness of the Somali people. We see the results of a failed state and can sympathize.

But we also may feel that a government is its people and contemplate the tie between a failed state and the citizens that allowed the failure.

We ponder the idea that the world is a small place now, and how so much tragedy can take place on such a big stage with the whole world watching.

That is, of course, one of the plusses of having a popular film zero in on the situation, bringing attention to what has long been considered by some a 'regional issue'.

I have to be honest with you all. When I was first approached about being here tonight I balked a bit. In conversations with friends who've seen the film, I was warned that Captain Phillips is not an easy movie to watch and many said it took them a few days to recover from the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder they experienced after sitting through the film ... and they know what a wimp I can be.

You see, although my brother is a terrific actor and I totally buy him in whatever role he's playing, it's still very difficult for me to watch people be mean to him ... and people are very mean to him in this movie.

In giving it some thought, however, I conducted a personal reality check. After all, my brother is an actor who is playing a role.

I well know that he and everyone else working on the film sat down to at least three great meals each day. I know that they slept in comfy beds in nice hotels, that every need was met and, most importantly, that they knew how and when the story would end for them.

Any stress or tension I may feel while watching Captain Phillips will be ill-founded and my ordeal will last only a couple of hours.

How completely this almost momentary discomfort differs from the horrors experienced by some of you in the audience tonight! Not only the ordeal of captives, but also of their families, friends [and] loved ones.

While those being held lived constant hardship and crushing fears that must have grown by the day, those back home who cared about them were stuck in a hell that had absolutely no confirmed notion of what conditions their loved ones were being subjected to, no idea what the duration of captivity might be and no guarantee of a positive outcome.

How many possible scenarios must have played out in the minds of mothers and wives and daughters and fathers and sons and brothers and sisters, grandparents and friends during days, weeks, then months of captivity for those who should have been home a long time ago?

Thankfully, you are home now.

Here we are, sitting in the comfy seats of Deepam Cinema, waiting to watch a movie. If anyone who lived the reality portrayed in this film feels things are starting to get too intense, just do what I'll be doing – reminding myself that what happened is over and I'll soon be safely tucked up in my own bed.

Before I go, I have something to share with you; I told my brother that I was doing this tonight, and he sent a short message for me to read out to you all. Here it is:

He says, "Our film of Captain Phillips aims to be an examination of more than just a story of good guys versus bad guys — though there certainly are Bad Guys at the root of it. The difficulties our world faces are all too weighty, the causes and motivations of piracy all too complex, and the actions of individuals predicated on the stakes of a million separate moments.

We hope our film covers such rough territory with the authenticity the subject deserves.

Tom Hanks"

Thank you all for giving me a few minutes of your time and for coming tonight.

Special thanks must go out to Masons Travel, Air Seychelles, The French Embassy, Hunt Deltel and PureFM for their generosity in supporting the event.

Now, sit back and enjoy a short version of the documentary 'Pirates in Paradise - Seychelles' which will be followed by the Seychelles premier of Captain Phillips. Thank you.