

**F**ollowing the formation of the Seychelles Democracy Watch, the first ever local election observer group, Le Seychellois caught up with Andre Pool, the former Parti Lepep Member of the National Assembly for Anse Boileau. Mr. Pool is an experienced international election observer, who has worked with SADC and La Francophonie in various countries. We asked him, what makes a good election observer?

**LS: In all elections we have a group of observers, either local or international. Why do we need election observers?**

**AP:** In my opinion, I think it's important that we always have a group of observers, either local or international, so that they can help monitor the electoral process. Their presence is also like a referee. They are the ones who help us improve our electoral system. An observer mission should be given the liberty to observe the process without any interference and that will allow it to compile fair and balanced written observations, based on what they have witnessed first hand.

**LS: What qualities do you need to become an election observer?**

**AP:** First and foremost, you need to be impartial. That is when you are called upon to be part of the overall mission, you have to make sure that your presence doesn't favour any individual politician or political party. Secondly you must be prepared to engage and note the concerns of all those involved in the race. Thirdly, if you make any observation that you feel needs the urgent attention of the Election Commission; you should act on it with immediacy to ensure your credibility amongst those contesting the election. Fourthly, you need training that prepares you for any observer mission.

**LS: What are the essential components of this training?**

**AP:** Any election is a process. It doesn't take place only on the day voters go to the polls. My training has involved many areas, such as: the verification of the Voters Register (especially how it's prepared), the candidate selection process, how a political party chooses its parliamentary or presidential election can-



round of the presidential election, with the La Francophonie observer group.

Everywhere I have been to it's evident that the preparation normally works out fine. However, in some cases, many problems arise on polling day. Many violations are committed, most of which the contesting parties have themselves agreed to outlaw. I can say I've learnt a lot. Although each country has their own set up, there are common issues between them.

**LS: For the first time in Seychelles electoral history, there'll be a local election observer group. What's your opinion of the formation of Seychelles Democracy Watch?**

**AP:** For me, this is a very good initiative. My opinion is based on how I've seen other local and international observer groups working. They really help the international group to cover as much ground as possible where elections are being organized. International observers are not many. Therefore, they cannot cover everywhere. Because of the financial constraint, most international observer groups stay in one place for a very brief period, therefore, the local observers are better equipped to observe the pre-election period. Most importantly, local observers are more familiar with the local situation and can easily detect any irregularities.

The members of the team should be well trained. Credibility is of utmost importance. No member should have a known affiliation with any candidate or party. What is happening in Seychelles is a very good thing. However, since it is for the first time, we'll wait and see how they will get the job done. But in my opinion, we should encourage and even help them as much as we can, to allow them to do a good job, to ensure that this election and other elections in the future are done in a peaceful and calm manner.

didates, the campaign strategy, the setting up of polling station, the voting process and special arrangements for polling day, counting process, and getting access to election results. All in all, the training should cover the entire process starting prior to Election Day and after the results are announced. This will ensure that all contestants are satisfied with the process.

**LS: Now tell us about your personal experience as a past election observer?**

**AP:** My first mission was to go on a training in Namibia organized by ISA. After that I was selected to participate in an election observer mission in Tanzania, Namibia, Malawi and the Comoros. In Namibia I was selected as the Head of the observer group. My mission to the Comoros was the most interesting though, as I had the opportunity to observe both the first and second