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Sir James R. Mancham, a Man for all regions

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Alan MacAskill finds a man who loves his native Seychelles, but is still hungry for international experiences as is printed in Lloyds TSB International

(Forimmediaterelease.net) Political coups, Cold War conspiracies, launching airlines, and fighting for world peace – Sir James R. Mancham has had front-line experience of them all, and more.

“At over 70, I feel like a son of the world. And I love it!” he said. There's no hiding the infectious enthusiasm of Sir James Mancham, elder statesman and serial entrepreneur. As the founding President of the Republic of Seychelles, Sir James's life has been as colorful as it's been successful: in turns, a lawyer, a head of state, a businessman in forced exile, and now a leading elder statesman in the Indian Ocean region. His journey hasn't lacked excitement.

"I've always had a business gene," he said, "That's why, even when I was in exile from my beloved Seychelles, I never became a broken man. I was always able to maintain the standard of life I'd achieved as a political leader."

He is fiercely proud of his “beloved Seychelles,” but it's far from being an inward-looking devotion. “We're all one,” he likes to say, “and part of the global village.” That was a wide perspective gained from an early age.

The son of a local businessman, Sir James left the capital, Victoria, in 1957, when he took a five-week voyage via Mombasa and Cairo to study law in London. After being called to the bar at the Middle Temple, he moved to study at the University of Paris and then undertook international labor studies in Geneva.

POLITICAL ACTIVITY

On returning to the islands, he took up general practice and became active in politics. His rise was inexorable – Chief Minister in 1966, Prime Minister, and then President of the republic ten years later. “I recognized that the Seychelles was too small to afford to be insular,” he recalled, “We needed to open ourselves to the world.” So, he created the infrastructure for a tourism industry which prospered as the economy developed.

Despite a popular and successful tenure as the elected leader of the republic, Sir James's government was deposed by a coup led by France-Albert René, while Mancham was in London attending a

Commonwealth Heads of State Conference and the Queen's Jubilee in 1977. He wasn't to return home until after the end of the Cold War – 15 years later.

Stranded in London, he recalls that his big problem was to maintain the standard of life he'd achieved as a political leader. Unlike other exiled heads of state, he was determined not to rely on the charity of others. "I could tell friends of my plight and ask for money, but I knew this wouldn't last, and I'd outstay my welcome," he said. That's when his business gene kicked in.

"I knew my role had to be that of an entrepreneur. It was better to use my contacts to give people the opportunity to do business together," Sir James said. That way, he earned commission fees for the deals he facilitated – "and kept my friendships." He used the contacts with the powerful and the influential that he'd cultivated during his leadership tenure. "Knowing these people has enriched my life, particularly in the philosophical and intellectual sense. It's provided many souvenirs in the cupboards of my memories," he shared.

BUSINESS LIFE

And business came his way. He helped to establish a brewery on Grenada. He became president of Berlin European Airways. He acted as a public relations ambassador for Lars Eric Lindblad's cruise tours – "Lars was the father of eco-tourism. He opened up Antarctica, the Galapagos, and even the Seychelles before the airport was inaugurated," Sir James explained.

As a non-domicile in the UK, Sir James maintained the long banking relationship with Lloyds TSB that he'd first established back in 1959. "It was my father," he remembered, "who told me to keep your banker close, establish a reputation, and build trust." He never forgot that and has a good relationship with Emma Quayle, Relationship Manager, who looks after his account. "I speak with her regularly on the phone and visit to discuss my finances whenever I'm in Europe," he said.

Reputation and loyalty have counted high with Sir James in his own career. Rather than turning his back on his homeland, he stayed steadfast to its cause throughout his exile. When the Soviet Union collapsed, he returned to the Seychelles in 1992 to contest the election there. "My popularity rating remained high, even though 35 percent of the people had left the country after the coup. In the elections I led the opposition with 42 percent of the popular vote," he said.

Despite narrowly losing in the Presidential elections, Sir James remained in parliament until 2005. And since then has maintained a high profile mixing public service with entrepreneurship – he's just launched a new magazine, *The Voice of the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea*.

He had found a different atmosphere in the country, one which persuaded him to project himself as an "apostle of national reconciliation" in an effort "to bring unity and harmony rather than preside over an angry kingdom of divided people."

And now his boundless energies are focused on a wider canvas. **He is President of the Global Peace Council of the Universal Peace Federation** and was recently voted onto the committee of elders of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). "The politician," he has discovered, "is interested in power. He's interested in the next election. The statesman is interested in the next generation. What the world requires at this time," he insisted, "is more statesmen."

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