Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, and Environment and Sustainable Development (Environment and Sustainable Development Division)

“WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY”

Draft Speech

Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity, and Environment and Sustainable Development

The Hon Marie Joseph Noël Etienne Ghislain SINATAMBOU

Le Pétrin
05 June 2017
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A warm welcome to you all.

It gives me great pleasure to be in your midst this morning for the celebration of the World Environment Day 2017. The World Environment Day is the biggest annual event for awareness raising and positive environmental action. It is celebrated by millions of people around the planet every 5 June since 1972.

The theme chosen for this year by the United Nations Environment Programme is “Connecting People to Nature” and has as slogan “I’m with Nature”. This year’s theme invites us to appreciate the beauty and importance of our planet and its natural resources. It makes us think about how we are part of nature and how intimately we depend on it. The theme challenges us to cherish this vital relationship and to take forward the call to protect the only planet Earth that we all share.

Le Pétrin, located within the Black River Gorges National Park, has been selected to mark the World Environment Day due to its rich biodiversity and panoramic landscape as well as the numerous breathtaking viewpoints and waterfalls. Guided tours will be provided to the public starting from today and ending on Sunday 11 June 2017. I am inviting all of you to seize this opportunity to be with nature. You will
be able to listen to the chirping of birds, whistling of the winds and admiring the lush green expanse of forests.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

In the age of asphalt and smartphones and with our busy modern lifestyle, connections with nature is becoming very rare. But we must recognize that the harmony between humanity and nature is of utmost importance so that both are able to thrive. Scientific advances in the field of environment have helped us understand the countless ways in which natural systems support our own prosperity and well-being. For example, farmers and fishermen harness nature to provide us with food; the world’s oceans and forests act as vast sink for carbon dioxide which is the main culprit for global warming and climate change; scientists develop medicines using genetic material drawn from the millions of species that make up the Earth’s astounding biological diversity.

When ecosystems are threatened, whether by pollution, climate change or over-exploitation of resources, it is humanity that suffers. It is almost impossible for our planet to sustain our current consumption patterns and if we do not take urgent necessary actions, economic and social development will be jeopardized.

The Government acknowledges fully the serious consequences resulting from the degradation of the environment and its impact on the quality of life, health and our economy. As a small island developing state with a
fragile ecosystem and limited resources we have no choice but to put environmental protection high on our agenda.

The World Risk Report 2016 has ranked Mauritius 13th country with the highest disaster risk and 7th most exposed to natural hazards. The threatening impacts of climate change are already being felt with an accelerated sea level rise, accentuated beach erosion, increase in frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as floods, cyclones and water scarcity. Water supply by 2030 may not be sufficient to satisfy projected demand, and agricultural production may decline by as much as 30%. Several beaches, which are so important for our tourism industry, are gradually retreating. For example, the shoreline at Baie du Cap has retreated by more than 20m based on comparison of past and present aerial satellite images.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is high time for concrete actions. My Ministry is leaving no stone unturned to prepare us to adapt to climate change. Coastal protection and rehabilitation works at various sites along the coast where beach erosion is a major problem are being undertaken. Moreover, implementation of the conservation plans prepared by the Japan International Cooperation Agency for 14 coastal sites have also started.

It is also worth noting that under the Adaptation Fund project currently being implemented by my Ministry, soft and hard beach protection
measures are being carried out at Mon Choisy and Riviere des Galets to protect the communities living in these coastal areas and build up resilience towards the adverse effects of Climate Change and sea level rise.

With respect to solid waste management, as you are aware the amount of solid waste generated in Mauritius is increasing due to the rise in the standard of living of the population. We are now living in a time of throw-away consumerism. I wish to point out that Government spends around **Rs1 billion** annually on waste management, including waste collection, operation and maintenance of transfer stations and transportation of wastes to landfill, and, operation and maintenance of the landfill site.

My Ministry is now working on a new Solid Waste Management Strategy where emphasis is being laid on maximum recycling and resource recovery from wastes. Our desired objective is to reach a zero-waste target for the long-term. This Strategy will focus on waste reduction, re-use and recycling and consequently reduced reliance on landfilling.

Another important measure that Government is taking is the greening of the economy which is an essential path to achieve sustainable development. In a green economy, economic processes are characterized by low inputs, low emissions, low wastes, higher
efficiency in resource use and better product designs. This will not only improves human well-being, but also lessens inequalities and reduces environmental and ecological risks.

You will all agree with me that Environmental Education and sensitization are two important tools towards helping to achieve environmental sustainability. Information and education have a crucial role in helping to develop widespread understanding of the importance and fragility of our life support systems and the need for the preservation of the environment with its natural resources. In this context, my Ministry with the financial assistance of the US Embassy has prepared a Toolkit on Good Environmental Practices which will be launched shortly.

The objective is to sensitise the school community specially the lower secondary students on major environmental issues and to promote environmental stewardship through good practices such as waste minimisation, energy and water saving, amongst others.

I firmly believe that youth has a pivotal role to play in environmental protection as they will be the leaders of tomorrow. By raising their awareness on environmental challenges we expect a change in their mindset for adopting a sustainable lifestyle.

The toolkit contains information on tree planting, solid waste management, climate change, air pollution, water stress, energy use,
biodiversity and sustainable lifestyle. I will make an appeal to the teachers to fully support our dear students to put into practice what they will learn from the toolkit. I seize this opportunity to heartily thank the US Embassy for this laudable support to produce this valuable toolkit.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

To further sensitise the population on the Environment, my Ministry is launching a painting competition to disseminate information pertaining to the environment through illustrations. The winner will receive a cash prize of Rs 50 000. A song completion on the theme environment will also be launched. The winner will receive a cash prize of Rs 100 000.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is our responsibility today to provide you, and all the citizens of Mauritius, with a sound and healthy environment for a better quality of life. Despite all its goodwill, Government alone cannot create the right conditions for a sound environment. We need the full participation of all our citizens. We must all respond positively for the preservation of our environment and **be with Nature.**

On this note I am extremely pleased to mark the World Environment Day celebration in this green paradise of Le Petrin.

Thank you.