Address

by

Hon. Jayeshwur Raj Dayal, CSK, PDSM, QPM
Minister of Environment, Sustainable Development, Disaster and Beach Management

Event organised by the

African Network for Policy Research for Sustainability

• Official Presentation of Earth Hour 2015
• Launching of “Let’s Do It Eco – Mahashivaratree”
• Announcement - Setting up of the African Youth Initiative on Climate Change”

St Georges Hotel, Port-Louis
Saturday 31 January 2015 at 9.30 hours

The Executive Chairman and Members of the African Network for Policy Research for Sustainability,

The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Sustainable Development, Disaster and Beach Management

Representatives of religious organisations,

Representatives of the Private Sector and Non-Governmental Organisations,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to be present amongst you today at this important event organized by the African Network for Policy Research and Advocacy for Sustainability (ANPRAS). At the very outset I would like to congratulate and thank the Executive Chairman, Dr Raj Chintaram and the members of ANPRAS for their contribution in pushing forward the sustainable development agenda at local and international levels.

I am very pleased to be associated with ANPRAS for the official presentation of Earth Hour 2015, the launch of “Let’s Do it Eco-Mahashivaratreer” Campaign, to sensitiseorganisations and pilgrims on an eco-friendly approach to festivals, and the
announcement of the setting up of the African Youth Initiative on Climate Change.

Non Governmental Organisations are instrumental in bringing change in society. They play a very important role in bridging the gap between policy formulation and implementation as they ease the understanding of policies and strategies devised by government bodies.

In Mauritius, several NGOs have been working in close collaboration with my Ministry for promoting environmental protection through activities such as awareness and sensitization campaigns and celebration of environmental events.

Recently, my Ministry collaborated with the Environmental Protection and Conservation Organisation (EPCO). This NGO organised a bicycle rally from Pamplemousses to Mon Choisy on Sunday 25 January 2015. This initiative focused on climate change, reduction of carbon footprint and promotion of a healthy lifestyle.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Whatever religion we practice and believe in, you will all agree with me that cleanliness is essential before worship. I
cannot refrain but quote the saying “Cleanliness is next to Godliness”. In all religious festivals, people pray to purify their minds and you will agree with me that even in our holy books, it is mentioned that we must respect and protect our environment for our well-being.

The MahaShivaratri festival is celebrated by a large number of Mauritians who pay tribute to Lord Shiva. Every year more than 500,000 pilgrims proceed to the Ganga Talao over a period of about 10 days.

These pilgrims are mostly citizens from all regions of the island but there are also foreigners travelling long distances to reach the sacred lake. During this festival, most of the devotees leave their homes and start a journey to Grand Bassin on foot. It has also been a tradition that volunteers offer food and refreshments to the pilgrims. Here, I must pay tribute to all volunteers who selflessly serve the pilgrims for the duration of the pilgrimage. Many of them have been doing so since a long time.

However, it has been observed over the past years that although bins have been placed along roads leading to Grand Bassin, littering is present. Some of the common littered items
are plastic bags, small paper bags, plastic cups, fruit peels, food wastes and dry battery cells.

Solid wastes have severe adverse effects on our environment. Some wastes such as plastic bags and cups remain in the environment for a very long time and can take up to 400 years to degrade. Solid wastes are responsible for:

• proliferation of disease-causing vectors (dengue, chikungunya, malaria),
• contamination of soil and ground water,
• an increase in the presence of pests and stray dogs in a vicinity thus giving rise to nuisances,
• eyesores and environmental degradation, and
• flooding problems by clogging drains and water courses.

You will recall that in March 2013, several areas of the country were flooded and more than 10 people sadly lost their lives. Reports established that accumulation of solid wastes in many water courses was the cause of flooding.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
The Government believes in the sense of responsibility of the Mauritian population. This sense of responsibility is a prerequisite for sustainable development. We all need to start by changing our habits and initiate small actions that will make a big difference.

I humbly request my fellow countrymen to adopt a sustainable lifestyle through the adoption and promotion of the 3R concept (Reduce Reuse and Recycle). There are small actions that contribute a lot and I urge Mauritians to adopt these actions:

- Dispose of your litter in bins,
- Do not throw wastes on the street, on barelands or in water courses,
- Do not burn wastes,
- Clean up any place or area you have used,
- Collect plastic bottles and dry cells for recycling, and
- Sensitise people on the need to have a clean and healthy environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen
Human progress is only sustainable when economic prosperity, social justice and a healthy environment go hand in hand. Thus I would make an appeal to you so that we put our efforts together in order to keep our environment in good condition for our future generations. To this end, let me assure you that government is fully committed to pave the way in making a difference and in reconstructing a cleaner, greener and a safer Mauritius.

The initiatives taken by ANPRAS will contribute a lot towards achieving an end, that is, STOP POLLUTION, STOP LITTERING. We should not depend on Government alone to bring about a radical transformation of our society from a ‘throw-away’ to an environment friendly one. I encourage NGOs, the private sector, and the whole population to be bold both in words and actions and contribute fully towards a CLEANER, GREENER AND SAFER MAURITIUS.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you a happy:

- ThaipoosamCavadee,
- MahaShivaratree, and
- Chinese Spring Festival.