Colleague Ministers,
Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Parliamentary Private Secretaries
Members of the National Assembly
Mayors and Chairmen of District Councils
Representative of UNDP
Mrs. Isabella Marras of UNEP
Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen I have much pleasure to welcome you all to the opening ceremony of the launching of the exhibition and of a series of awareness-raising workshops on the topic of Sustainable Consumption.

Today, 5 June, we are celebrating the World Environment Day and the theme for this year is “Don’t Desert our Drylands!” This theme of Desertification reminds us all of our environmental vulnerability and the need to better manage our resources and biodiversity. It is in this context that we have also launched today an ambitious tree planting campaign as part of World Environment Day to sensitize our people on the importance of protection of our biodiversity.

According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Report that was produced in 2005 through an extensive global partnership, any progress achieved in addressing the goals of poverty eradication, improved health, and environmental protection is unlikely to be sustained if most of the ecosystem services on which humanity relies continue to be degraded. The over-riding conclusion of this assessment report is that it lies within the power of human societies to ease the strains we are putting on the nature services of the planet, while continuing to use them to bring better living standards to all. Achieving this, however, will require radical changes in the way nature is treated at every level of decision-making; new ways of co-operation between government, business and civil society and by adopting alternative development models that are based on the principles of sustainable consumption and production. Climate change, loss of natural resources, extinction of species and environmental damage caused by pollution are the results of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.
The timing of the workshops on Sustainable Consumption and the World Environment Day theme of Desertification could not have been more appropriate. One of the primary issues on the international agenda today, is the need to reach sustainable patterns of consumption and production. This was strongly stressed both in the UN Millennium Declaration of 2000 and at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002.

Fundamentally, the message is that if we truly wish to reach sustainability, we must consider not only production aspects but also consumption patterns. And this means that we must not just look at production processes but also at the products themselves. The world leaders at WSSD also called for the development of a 10-Year Framework Programme on Sustainable Consumption and Production in support to regional and national initiatives.

In that respect, UNEP is taking a leading role to help countries and regions to develop these 10-year framework programmes.

It is in this context that I have found it necessary to kick start today the process of preparation of our national action plan on sustainable consumption and production. Let me take this opportunity to thank UNEP for having delegated a resource person in the name of Mrs Marras to moderate our workshops.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

In the Mauritius Strategy for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, clear-cut recommendations were made on the need for SIDS to adopt sustainable consumption patterns if we want to achieve resilience. I have to admit that so far our policies have mainly focused on achieving sustainable production. However, sustainable consumption and sustainable production are two sides of the same coin.

Focusing on one, while ignoring the other, does not make sense. Sustainable consumption is a relatively new policy concept and it remains to be mainstreamed into our sectoral policies and development plans. The Ministry of Environment has already started work on a new policy on sustainable consumption and production as part of our White Paper on the National Environmental Policy, and the new amendments to the Environment Protection Act 2002 will also take the concept into account.

On the production side, my Ministry, in collaboration with the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council, is setting up a National Cleaner Production Centre. We are also encouraging voluntary reporting from the private sector as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility, and we will soon launch a Mauritian Industry Environmental Reporting Award. Along the same lines, an industrial waste audit regulation as provided for under the Environment Protection Act 2002 will soon be promulgated to encourage cleaner production and reporting in business.

On the consumption side, a number of activities are on-going or planned. The present Plastic Carrier Bag Regulations have failed to address the unsustainable consumption of plastic carry bags. My Ministry is
coming up with a new plastic bag regulation whereby a mix of policy instruments will be applied with the aim of reducing the over-consumption of plastic carry bags.

Waste is the most visible sign of our failure to achieve sustainable consumption and production patterns. My aim is to convert Mauritius from a throw-away society into a recycled-based society. Just two weeks ago, my Ministry, together with the Ministry of Local Government, organised a workshop on the promotion of recycling and Government will see to it that recycling becomes the preferred option in its waste management strategy, instead of disposal. The active participation of small and medium enterprises during that workshop was very encouraging and this shows that there is a potential for developing a vibrant environment industry in Mauritius while pursuing sustainability.

As part of Environmental education activities, we have initiated composting projects in 50 schools in Mauritius. I am pleased to note that the first pilot school has already produced around 8 Kg of compost in three months. We are extending this project in 50 more schools. Through this practical initiative, children are encouraged to bring back home the idea of composting. This should be beneficial to the country in the long term.

Government also needs to set the good example and the best way to prove that we are committed to bring about the required change in consumption patterns is to adopt a green procurement policy.

I have decided to set up a Technical Advisory Committee on this subject with a view to developing a strategy for greening the public sector.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am keen on using awareness and education as a key tool to promote sustainable consumption. The Ministry of Environment & NDU has obviously a major role in this endeavour, but we expect all stakeholders who are present here today to take an active part in pushing forward the agenda of sustainable consumption. Sustainable consumption is a shared responsibility of Government, Business, Civil Society and Mass Media. I therefore make a strong appeal to you all to work together in partnerships so that we can bring the required change in our consumption patterns. Together we should find answers to such questions as:

- “How do we go about to change individual consumer’s lifestyle and behaviours?”

- “How can women – who are more close to consumption issues at the household level-, contribute in this initiative?”

- “How do we motivate our youth to adopt alternative consumption patterns?

- “How can consumers influence producers to adopt more sustainable practices?”
These questions have to be debated today and during the forthcoming three days when targeted groups involving youth, teachers, women and NGO’s will meet to discuss sustainable consumption.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The theme of sustainable consumption reminds me of the following famous quotation from Mahatma Gandhi: “The Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need, but not every man’s greed”. These words accurately sum up one of the key concerns of sustainable consumption. In its simplest form sustainable consumption encompasses consumers buying environmentally preferred goods and services like recycled paper, public transport, energy efficient devices etc. However, much more fundamentally, it also addresses the sustainability of lifestyles.

Sustainable consumption has to breach with the deep rooted beliefs that consuming more material goods and services brings a better lifestyle. What we need, therefore, is a common vision of the kind of sustainable lifestyle we want in the long term and this vision would then dictate our policies and actions.

We have thus a very important task in front of us. I understand that the objective of the series of workshops or dialogues is to come up with a road map and concrete recommendations on how to develop a National Action Plan and a 10-year framework programme on Sustainable consumption and Production. I can assure you all that I will give my full support to implement the recommendations of the workshops so as to move the concept of sustainable consumption forward. I hope that all the stakeholders from the public, parastatal, private and non-governmental organisations, Local Authorities, Women Associations and Youth and Media will work together as they have always been doing to make this series of workshop a success. Sustainable Consumption is a concept that needs to be built from the national level. Its success will depend on the level of ownership by governments, industry and civil society. The sign of willingness to work together and to own the process is already visible through your presence here and, more particularly, by your participation in the exhibition on the subject.

I thank all the organisations and companies who have accepted our invitation to exhibit during this week. I am impressed at the possibilities that exist and I am hopeful that we shall find the right answers to the questions I raised.

I wish to thank you all for your presence this morning. My special thanks, once again to Ms. Marras and UNEP to have accepted our invitation.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, I have now the pleasure to declare the exhibition and workshops on sustainable consumption open.

Thank you.