**One year To Go to COP26**

**British High Commission**

***Speech***

**Honourable Kavydass Ramano**

***Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change***

*Thursday 12 November 2020*

Your Excellency, Keith Allan, British High Commissioner

Excellencies,

All protocol observed

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

I am delighted to be in your midst today for the launching of this important *One Year to go to COP26* event. Allow me to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the British High Commissioner for the invitation he extended to me. Allow me to also recall that first this event is a reminder of crucial milestones that need to be concluded at the *26th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, commonly referred as *COP26*. Second, climate change concern everybody at all level and concerted efforts is a must to deal with it. It cannot be over emphasized that climate change remains one of the most significant challenges of our time.

According to a recent study conducted by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the first 20 years of this century have seen a staggering rise in climate disasters. There were more than 7,000 recorded disaster events worldwide, during the last two decades. There was a significant rise in climate related emergencies over the past 20 years mainly with flooding event alone accounting for more than 40 per cent of disasters and where close to 1.65 billion people were affected.

The year 2020 has also been particularly challenging with a significant number of climate related disasters worldwide. We have witnessed countless devastating events such as forest fires, floodings, heat waves, category-5 storms, accelerated melting of the ice cover and even locust swarms infestations, which are all together testimony of the aggravating trend of climate change.

To add salt to injury, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the global economy to a standstill and this health crisis has been the focus of our attentions over the past few months to such extent that we have been drawn to even lose sight of some of the key environmental challenges like climate change.

In fact, you will recall that while nearly two third of the planet was on lock-down last April, the Small Island nations of the Pacific including Fiji and Vanuatu were being hit by category-5 cyclone Harold. These vulnerable Island States had to deal with ‘*a crisis within a crisis’*. This was a harsh reminder that climate change remains a major threat to countries, to people, to our development agenda and to our socio-economic stability.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The writing is on the wall. The latest scientific evidences published last September by the *World Meteorological Organisation* in the *United in Science report* *2020,* once again highlighted the aggravating trend in which the planet is heading. As highlighted by the report, the probability of passing the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold which was set by the Paris Agreement in 2015 is growing every year. Actually, according to preliminary observations made by the *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*, year 2020 is on track to be one of the hottest years on record. At this pace, it is also likely that the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold will be reached as early as 2024. Hence, there is urgency to accelerate actions at global level.

You will recall that a key milestone was reached in 2015 in Paris, when for the first time all country Parties agreed on a landmark agreement to bring all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its impacts. The Paris Agreement has no doubt charted a new course in the global climate effort. Since 2015, the focus has been on the operationalization phase of the Paris Agreement and on finalising the “rulebook” for putting the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change into practice.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to reiterate that Mauritius, as a *Small Island Developing States,* is also not spared from the prevailing global climate crisis. Mauritius is often among the most vulnerable countries to climate change. Indeed, the recently published *2020 World Risk Report* has ranked Mauritius as the 53rd country with the highest disaster risk, out of 181 countries. However, we are still among the most exposed to natural hazard due to our geographical position which is situated in an active tropical cyclone basin.

The figures speak for themselves. Mauritius has experienced an increase in air temperature by up to 1.2 degree Celsius over the last few decades and the sea level is rising at an accelerated rate of 5.6 mm per year. In both cases, these figures exceed the global averages. Despite the variability observed in the rainfall pattern in the recent years, a general reduction of around 8% over the last 50 years has also been observed in the annual precipitation. As far as sea level rise is concerned, the width of our beaches, which is a major pillar of our economy, has been eroded, in some areas, by up to 20 metres during the last decade.

As regard to projections, according to the UN report *‘SIDS in Numbers 2017’*, Mauritius was projected to become a water stressed country by 2025, that is, in hardly 5 years from now. Moreover, the report has also projected that our agricultural production may decline by as much as 30% by 2050.

A study conducted by the *US National Academy of Sciences,* has also underlined that the chances of a major tropical cyclone occurring in the southern Indian Ocean basin will increase by 18% every decade.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite of its low contribution to the global greenhouse gas emissions scale, Mauritius is determined to contribute to the global effort for combatting climate change and to strengthen our resilience to its impacts. Our *Nationally Determined Contributions* (NDC) had pledged to reduce our emissions by 30% by 2030 and to promote adaptation measures across key sectors. In line with the Paris Agreement obligations, Mauritius has already initiated actions to review its NDC with the support of the *French Government* and the *United Nations Development Programme* and we are confident that we will submit our up-scaled commitments before the COP26.

My Ministry has also launched a number of initiatives to operationalize the Paris Agreement. It is formulating a *National climate change mitigation strategy and action plan* under the *Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions* *(NAMA)* programme for sectors such as energy, waste and agriculture. We are also formulating a *National Adaptation Plan* for sectors such as fisheries, coastal zones and infrastructure. We have also embarked on the development of a ‘*Long-term mitigation and adaptation strategies under Facilité 2050’ programme, with the assistance of the French Government through the Agence Francaise de Developpement.*

Another major step would be the promulgation of the Climate Change Bill which is presently being discussed at the National Assembly. This Bill will be a turning point to allow for the optimum coordination and mainstreaming of climate change across all sectors.

Ladies and gentlemen,

After the landmark COP21 which was held in 2015, year 2020 promised to be yet another key milestone in the international climate process as it was due to be start of the implementation phase of the Paris Agreement. However, given the exceptional circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the COP26, has been postponed for November 2021.

However, this event is still being viewed as the next major landmark in the international climate process, as we hope that the negotiation process will finally deliver the highly anticipated *‘rule book’* which will allow the full implementation of the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

We also trust that the new global political landscape will help to gain new momentum in the multilateral UN driven climate process.

I am convinced that the United Kingdom would make all possible efforts, as the incoming President of the Conference of Parties, to reach a landmark outcome in Glasgow. The leadership of the Right Honourable Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the appointed Minister of COP26, the Right Honourable *Alok Sharma*, would be instrumental for country Parties to come to agreement on an equitable and balance ‘*climate package’* which will take forward the Paris Agreement.

The underlying foundation for success of this round of negotiation must be through inclusiveness, extensive consultations with all governments and with the civil society, as well as transparency on plans and arrangements, in order to build trust. This will help to establish a positive atmosphere and complete issues left pending from the Madrid COP.

I wish here to reiterate the full support of the Republic of Mauritius to the British Government for the forthcoming COP26. We will do our fair share to meet our pledges and to support the process as a country Party for the successful achievement of the expected outcomes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to seize this opportunity to congratulate the UK government for having committed to contribute *11.6 billion Pounds Sterling* over the next 5 years in an *International Climate Finance* portfolio, to assist vulnerable and developing nations.

The UK government was also pioneer in amending its 2008 Climate Change Act, in 2019 to include a *"net zero"* emission target by 2050, in line with the Paris Agreement long term low emissions development strategy.

I wish to point out that the formulation of our forthcoming Climate Change Act, was inspired by the provisions of the UK Climate Change Act 2008, namely with respect to *“target setting” and “duty to prepare and report on policies”*. It is recalled that United Kingdom was among the first country to craft this far-sighted target in its Climate Change Act since 2008.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to also highlight some of the previous collaborations between our two countries in the climate change sector. You will recall that Mauritius received technical and financial assistance from the British High Commission to develop a ‘*2050 Pathways calculator’* in 2015, which is a modelling tool to explore different scenarios for the long term greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

The collaboration of the UK Government and the Commonwealth Office were also obtained in 2016, for the setting up of a *Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub*. Under this initiative we were able to receive technical support to improve access to climate finance funding envelopes by formulating bankable project proposals.

I also wish to commend the British High Commission for having set up a special *Covid-19 Fund* to support initiatives linked to economic recovery and response in the climate and health sectors as well as support to vulnerable groups.

I also wish to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to the British Government for the support extended to our country during the recent Oil spill event. The British Government had provided useful technical support by mobilising a team of high calibre experts from the *UK Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science,* who promptly prepared a very useful *Integrated Monitoring Strategy for the Oil spill.* I can testify thatHis Excellency, Keith Allan was personally involved on-site during cleaning activities and to follow up on the progress of the support that were provided.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With these words, I wish to conclude by again thanking our host, His Excellency Keith Allan, for his continuous and unwavering engagement in the environment and climate change sectors and above all for the friendship that he has always demonstrated to our country.

I will end by quoting an African saying, I quote. *"If you want to go fast, go alone; but if you want to go far, go together."* End of quote.

I thank you all for your kind attention.

K. R.