

EARTH DAY 2024

'Planet vs Plastics'

April 22nd is international mother Earth Day. It is a day to pay tribute to mother Earth and bring attention to how important it is to protect and preserve the environment. With over 193 countries participating in Earth Day activities since 1970, Earth Day has become a global event.

On this day, we are reminded of the wonder and beauty of our planet, as well as the urgency of protecting it. We are reminded that Earth is our home, our sacred place, and our source of life. We breathe its air, drink its water, and eat its food. Our existence depends on it, and it is our duty to protect it.

However, Mother Earth is clearly urging a call to action. Nature is suffering. Oceans filling with plastic and turning more acidic. Extreme heat, wildfires and floods, have affected millions of people. Climate change, pollution and man-made changes to nature are disrupting biodiversity and causing unbearable pressures on the ecosystem.

Against this background, there is a crucial need for collective and urgent action globally to safeguard our planet, our home. It's time to live sustainably, consume responsibly, and protect the environment. It's important to reduce our carbon footprint, conserve energy, and protect biodiversity. We need to support clean technologies, capitalize on renewable energy, and encourage eco-friendly practices.

To emphasize on one of the most significant environmental challenges of our time, this year's Earth Day 2024 theme is "**Planet vs. Plastics**". This theme is seeking to unite all sectors and segments of society including students, businesses, local communities, individuals, and NGOs in an unwavering commitment to call for the end of plastics for the sake of human and planetary health.

Plastics are polluting our planet and choking our ocean, harming human health, and damaging ecosystems vital to our livelihoods. The UN Environment Programme is raising the alarm on the severity of the global plastics crisis and highlighting the networks of everyday people, coastal workers, and communities who are spearheading solutions to beat plastic pollution.

More than 430 million tons of plastic are produced each year, two-thirds of which is cast aside as waste after just one use. Eleven million metric tons of

plastics enter our oceans alone each year, in addition to the estimated 200 million metric tons that already flow through our marine environments. At the current rate of production, there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean by mid-century.

We can be proud that Mauritius has been among the precursors globally to tackle the issues of plastics in a firm and proactive way since the past few years.

In addition to ongoing awareness raising and cleaning campaigns, Government has promulgated a panoply of legislative and regulatory frameworks to address the issues of plastic pollution country wise and they are as follows:

- The Environment Protection (Control of Single Use Plastic Products) Regulations have been promulgated in July 2020 and came into operation from 15 January 2021, to regulate the manufacture, sale, supply and importation of a large array of non-biodegradable single use plastic products.
- The Environment Protection (Banning of Plastic Bags) Regulations have been promulgated in August 2020 and came into operation from 01 March 2021 to regulate the manufacture, sale, supply and importation of plastic bags. With these regulations, an estimated 400 million plastic bags have been avoided in our waste stream and in our environment.
- The Environment Protection (PET bottle Permit) Regulations promulgated in 2001 have resulted in a recycling rate of 35 to 40% of the estimated 130 million PET bottles generated annually in Mauritius.
- The Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act proclaimed in 2023 has the objective to ensure the environmentally safe and sound management of solid waste and the sustainable waste management system through the adoption of a circular economy approach focusing on waste reduction, reuse, treatment, safe disposal, material recovery and recycling.
- New legislation is also in preparation to manage post-consumer PET beverage bottles in order to achieve a collection and recycling rate of at least 80% of post-consumer PET in the short term. Government is tackling this complex issue of plastic through the development of a "Roadmap" to put Mauritius onto a plastic waste and pollution free pathway by 2030.

To commemorate Earth Day 2024, the Ministry is also organizing a series of activities as follows:

- 1) A poster competition for primary schools on the theme of Earth Day 2024;
- 2) A short video film competition for secondary schools on the theme "Planet vs. Plastics"; and
- 3) A 3-D maquette competition for students of Higher Education Institutions;

These initiatives are being carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, the Higher Education Commission and the Mauritius Film Development Corporation.

- 4) The launching of a mobile application, MONATIR, which will provide vital and dynamic environmental information to the public, including Air Quality Index, penalties for major environmental offences, details on waste management facilities, public beaches and weather information amongst others.

Happy Earth Day 2024! Let's continue to work together to protect and preserve our beautiful planet for future generations. Remember, every small action counts towards a greener and more sustainable world. Let's make every day Earth Day!