

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER
(Sitting of Tuesday 18 August 2020)

Mr Speaker Sir,

I wish to make a Statement on the situation regarding the grounding of MV Wakashio and the oil spill which occurred on 06 August 2020.

The House will agree with me that this event is an unprecedented ecological disaster for Mauritius, the moreso that the grounding of the vessel occurred in an environmentally sensitive area rich in terrestrial and marine flora and fauna, namely, the Pointe d'Esny Ramsar Site, the Blue Bay Marine Park, the Ile aux Aigrettes Nature Reserve, the Grand Port Fishing Reserve and mangroves amongst others.

However, I wish to assure the House that as from day one, prompt actions were taken by my Ministry, various authorities and stakeholders at local level along with foreign experts.

As at yesterday, around 14.5 kilometres of booms have been deployed at Blue Bay Marine Park, Pointe d'Esny, Ile aux Aigrettes, Pointe Brocus, the lagoon area of Wakashio and outside the reef by the National Coast Guard, Polyeco Société Anonyme, Special Mobile Force, Vivo Energy, the French experts and the Mauritius Ports Authority, in order to protect the sites from impacts of oil. Additional shore booms have been deployed around the Blue Bay Marine Park to secure the area and its rich ecosystem. River booms have been placed at Rivière La Chaux, Rivière des Creoles and Rivière Champagne. The National Coast

Guard is constantly monitoring those areas to ensure maximum protection.

Mr Speaker Sir,

The National Environmental Laboratory of my Ministry together with the Ministry of Health and Wellness; the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping and the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security, are constantly monitoring the quality of air, coastal water quality, ecosystem including flora and fauna.

In respect of disposal of oil waste and debris, I am informed by the Solid Waste Management Division of my Ministry that as at 17 August 2020,

- (i) a total of 941 metric tons of liquid waste Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) have been collected. Out of these, a total of 716 metric tons have been temporarily stored at the Mare Chicose landfill while the remaining liquid waste HFO has been sent to the registered recyclers;
- (ii) 350 tons of contaminated solid wastes and debris have been received and are stored at the Interim Hazardous Waste Storage Facility. These are repackaged in United Nations approved big bags (Flexible Intermediate Bulk Container) and are transported at the Interim Hazardous Waste Storage Facility at La Chaumière for temporary storage; and
- (iii) 474 cubic metres of contaminated booms containing straws and bottles, have been collected and stored at La Laura transfer station and the hazardous wastes facility.

Mr Speaker Sir,

Following a request for assistance to our foreign diplomatic missions in Mauritius to respond to the oil spill, around 70 experts are presently in Mauritius on different areas of expertise related to the salvage operations, impacts of the oil spill and response thereto. These experts are amongst others, from France, India, Japan, the United Nations, the Salvage Team, Polyeco *Societe Anonyme*, International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation Ltd, and Le Floch Depollution. Remote assistance is also being obtained from Australia and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) from the United States. Experts from other countries are expected to reach Mauritius in the coming days.

Furthermore, the University of Mauritius has also set up a pool of experts at local and international levels to advise on scientific matters to respond to the impacts of the oil spill and the subsequent restoration of the affected areas.

Mr Speaker Sir,

I wish to highlight that my Ministry established contact with authorities (Region Reunion) of Reunion Island on the next day of the grounding of the vessel, that is, on 26 July 2020, through the French Embassy to seek support as part as the POLMAR plan, should the need arise. Reunion Island set up a crisis cell on 06 August 2020 and subsequently, France delegated a ship, Le Champlain, with 22 crew members from the Marine Nationale de France and 20 tonnes of equipment, including 2 Zodiacs to assist in the response of the oil spill.

Furthermore, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, has delegated His Excellency, Mr Sébastien Lecornu, Ministre des Outre-Mer of France, to effect an official visit to Mauritius in the context of the French assistance following the oil spill. Mr Lecornu led a delegation to Mauritius on Sunday 16 August 2020. The latter met the Prime Minister, visited the affected areas and took cognizance of the French intervention in Mauritius through a presentation. The Minister and I also held a joint press conference on the same day to inform on the anti-pollution measures being implemented.

The Minister expressed concerns on the disposal of the forward section of the vessel. In that respect, he despatched three experts from Cedre and Cellule Anti-Pollution, who were in Mauritius yesterday. The experts had technical meetings with the Shipping Division of the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping and the Salvage Team. Action is being taken to tow the forward section of the vessel to a safe distance of 8 nautical miles from the coast. Consultations are underway on the appropriate manner to dispose of that part of the vessel.

Regarding the rear section of the vessel, it is still aground at the reef. Due to the adverse weather conditions, the Chief Salvage Master has indicated that it is still risky to remove the remaining 30 cubic metres of oil therefrom. Oil skimming operations will resume as soon as the weather permits. All pollutants will be removed from this part of the vessel before it is dismantled.

Mr Speaker Sir,

The environment expert team from the International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation Limited has prepared an Action Plan

for the cleanup of the shoreline at the affected areas based on site surveys carried out thereat. As at date, there are some 15 affected sites situated along the south east coast of Mauritius, from Pointe d'Esny to Grand River South East including some ecologically sensitive islets.

The Action Plan addresses aspects such as site prioritization, delineation of sites and zones, logistics, clean-up techniques, personnel, waste management, end-points and demobilization.

The Protection & Indemnity Club (Insurer) has appointed Le Floch DePollution for the overall coordination of the cleanup operations. A formal request has been made for the enlistment of services of the affected local communities including fishers, fishmongers, pleasure craft operators amongst others, to be involved in the cleaning operations and in line with our local legislation.

The Action Plan will be adjusted as and when required in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Mr Speaker Sir,

In respect of expenses being incurred for the various operations, a special bank account has been opened at the State Bank of Mauritius under the Prime Minister's Relief Fund to cater for any relevant expenditure related thereto. An initial contribution of Rs 100 million has been made by the National Environment Fund and the Prime Minister's Relief Fund respectively. Furthermore, the services of a team of experts will be enlisted to assist

Mauritius to make an assessment of the social, economic and environmental damages caused and to make claims accordingly.

I would wish to thank and congratulate the people of Mauritius, volunteers, NGOs, private and public sector organisations, the Mauritian diaspora across the world, all donor countries, the United Nations and international organisations, local and international experts, for the initiatives taken and support they have provided since 06 August 2020 to help contain the oil spill and mitigate the impacts thereof. At this stage, I wish to reassure the House and the population that the worst is behind us. We are confident that in uniting our efforts, we will overcome this unprecedented environmental disaster.

With these words, I thank you, Mr Speaker Sir.

K. R.