

**OPENING CEREMONY OF THE WORKSHOP ON  
MAURICE ILE DURABLE  
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE PAILLES**

**WEDNESDAY 01 DECEMBER 2010**

**10 00 HRS**

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**SPEECH**

**BY**

**DR THE HON NAVINCHANDRA RAMGOOLAM, GCSK, FRCP  
PRIME MINISTER**

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Colleague Ministers,  
The Lord Mayor,  
Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps,  
The Director, Agence Française de Développement,  
Distinguished Guests,

Despite the heavy schedule of work at the National Assembly this week, I have chosen to be with you for the opening ceremony of the workshop on Maurice-Ile-Durable.

I am here, first and foremost, to reiterate my personal commitment and that of my Government to this visionary project.

My Special Adviser, Professor Joël de Rosnay was to be the lead resource person at the workshop. Unfortunately, he had to leave yesterday because of an important professional commitment in London.

But since his arrival, he has met with all those concerned, including the youth of our country. He has animated conferences, given interviews to the media, met with the MID Committee set up under the aegis of my Office with Mr Osman Mahomed as its Chairperson.

I had two working sessions with Professor de Rosnay to review progress on MID and discuss ways and means to move the MID project forward and to ensure that there is a clear action plan; and prioritise what we need to do over the next five years.

Let me, at the very outset, dispel a couple of prevailing perceptions about the Maurice-Ile-Durable project.

First of all – it is a vision which belongs not to the Government, or me or Professor Joel de Rosnay.

The MID project belongs to the Mauritian nation.

It belongs to each and everyone of us.

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Secondly, the MID project is not just a renewable energy project.

C'est un projet de Société pas un projet énergétique.

MID is essentially a vision that seeks to transform the environmental, economic and social landscape of our country.

It is about sustainable development and inclusive growth.

The intrinsic links between the environment and social justice, just as those between sustainability and equity, have now been clearly established.

The MID vision is embedded in a strategic framework embracing five development pillars. Professor de Rosnay spoke of MID 4 E's – I have added another important E ! So we should in fact be referring to MID 5 E's !!

These five development pillars are:

- Education;
- Environment;
- Energy;
  
- Employment; and
- Equity.

MID seeks to build up capital, not only for our generation but for generations to come. We want to leave a legacy of which posterity will be proud.

You may recall that one of the earlier decisions that I took soon after the General Elections of July 2005, more precisely on 6th October 2005, was to put an end to a project that would have been an ecological disaster of momentous proportion.

Although I was advised that it was too late to stop the project, I went to Ferney to see for myself together with all the officials – those who were against. I never take no for an answer. I had no doubt what had to be done for the greater good.

Against the advice of many, I stood my ground and decided that the Ferney Highway Project would never see the day as long as I was Prime Minister. I am glad Ferney will forever remain a biodiversity treasure trove for generations to come. And it was not just about saving this remarkable biodiversity.

Many seem to forget that forests and trees absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen. That is why we should think twice before felling down any tree ! Whenever I travel in my car and I see trees being felled, I telephone the Minister of Agriculture and ask him to explain why and will give instructions to get it stopped.

Professor Joël de Rosnay has described my decision on stopping the Ferney Highway project as the "Ferney Spirit".

It is the same Ferney Spirit that we need to forge for the MID vision.

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MID is a national undertaking where every single citizen in Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agaléga and St Brandon has an opportunity to participate in shaping the future of our country.

Edouard Maunick once said:

“Nous sommes les lendemains des siècles à venir”.

MID provides the Mauritian nation with a truly unique opportunity to forge a national purpose and showcase to the world that Mauritius is indeed an exceptional country !!

There are some in the opposition who say the MID project is an empty shell. They have never ever imagined anything – never done anything, yet they are first to criticise that it is not enough. We all know that the longest journey has to start with the first step. We have started doing a lot of things. Awareness of the need for sustainable development is the first important step.

We have started inculcating a culture of Eco-Responsibility in all our citizens, including the young.

Our National Curriculum Framework has integrated sustainable development into the different learning areas. Our aim is to bring out the best in children and make them responsible citizens, aware of the need to protect our environment and the need to combine economic growth with sustainable development.

Extra-curricular programmes are also undertaken to raise environmental awareness in our children.

The world has been witnessing increasingly deadly natural catastrophes that can be attributed to the irresponsible exploitation of natural resources. In fact, human demand on natural resources has doubled since 1966. We can no longer be passive observers of the reckless exploitation of our natural capital.

Exceptional situation requires exceptional solutions.  
We must learn to adapt to new situations.

And we are recording positive results, namely on Demand Side Management of electricity, with a reduced annual energy demand in most sectors, even though our economy is still growing.

In 2008, the Government earmarked Rs 1.3 billion for the Maurice-Ile-Durable Fund. During the past three years, the Fund has focused its attention on renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes.

It has funded a wind farm in Rodrigues, which is operational since last September. By the end of next year, two wind farms will be operational in Mauritius, namely at Curepipe Point and at Plaine des Roches. A new hydropower station is operational along Nicollière Canal and another one will be operational at Midlands by the end of next year.

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A landfill gas to energy project is being implemented at Mare Chicose. Government will contribute Rs 100 Million, over a period of five years, to enable the CEB to buy electricity from the landfill gas plant.

Over the past five years, there has been an investment of Rs 4.5 billion for production of electricity to meet the demand and financing of renewable energy projects and, in the next three years, about Rs 6 billion will be spent for further expansion and financing of renewable energy.

We currently rely on imports for some 80% of our energy needs. We must target 35% autonomy by 2025 through increased use of green energy.

Sustainable development is also about promoting a well-organised and an efficient Water Sector.

Water is a scarce resource which is critical for our socio-economic development. Albert Einstern has said that World War III would be about water. For too long we have taken such resources for granted. We should, henceforth, exercise a more stringent control on the way we use our water.

It is inconceivable that year in year out we hear the same story of more than 50% of water from our dams and reservoirs being lost through leakages in our distribution system.

In a country like Singapore, people have come to appreciate the real value of water. Singapore imports water from Malaysia. Singapore is one third the size of Mauritius. Its population is nearly five times ours. Nevertheless, water is supplied to the whole population on a 24 hour basis and wastage is estimated to be less than 5%.

We need to put order in the chaotic situation prevailing in the institutions which are responsible for the management of water.

In Mauritius we have four Authorities for water management. In Singapore there is only one Authority.

We have decided to rationalise the activities of the Central Water Authority, the Irrigation Authority, the Water Resources Unit and the Wastewater Authority into a single body for operational efficiency and better responsiveness to the needs of the population.

The Central Electricity Board (CEB) is yet another institution where a complete overhaul will be undertaken. We will put in place a strong Independent Regulatory Authority for Energy. And we must convert the Central Electricity Board into a Central Energy Board !

In addition, on the international front, at the Copenhagen Conference, I asked for special consideration for SIDS as a group in line with the Mauritius Strategy.

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I negotiated further advancement in the framework by which SIDS benefit from the carbon trading process under the Emissions Trading System and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).

I argued that the CDM should be simplified to allow SIDS to take advantage of it. Small insular economies, like Mauritius, have not been able to benefit from same because of the complex and costly procedures, as well as, the small size of the projects.

I also proposed nationally appropriate mitigation actions by developing countries that would be enabled by finance, technology transfer and capacity building, as well as, the establishment of an international adaptation programme with commitments by developed countries to achieve a funding level of at least US\$ 100 billion annually by 2020. I must say that President Sarkozy backed this proposal to its hilt.

Equally at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Trinidad and Tobago, three of my four proposals to support insular countries to mitigate the impact of climate change were retained regarding:

- Financial aid;
- Technology transfer; and
- The due date to disburse financial support to small insular countries.

Additionally, following my intervention, the percentage of financial assistance in favour of small economies was doubled from 5% to 10%.

An area of major concern for the world and for us is the erosion of our biodiversity and its consequential economic and environmental impact !

It is no coincidence that 2010 has been declared the International Year of Biodiversity. Biodiversity is vital for our ecosystem.

Marine ecosystems around the world are at risk of substantial degradation due to pollution, over-fishing and climate change.

The drastic change in environmental conditions is already directly impacting on health and price of commodities.

Small insular economies like Mauritius and low-income countries are more vulnerable and this has serious implications for our people. We therefore cannot continue with the 'business as usual' attitude.

Mauritius has witnessed an increasing degradation of its land resource. The MID Support Project Paper suggests that 43% of our land resource has been depleted.

Without strategic planning and measures ensuring sustainability, we will not have the necessary resilience to weather future economic and environmental shocks.

Government has introduced fossil energy reduction projects, like solar water heaters, energy saving lamps and low energy street lighting and traffic lights.

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I have created a dedicated Ministry for Sustainable Development, precisely because we need a clear action plan to where we want to be in the coming years.

The sugarcane industry has been undergoing major structural changes to maintain its viability and competitiveness. Particular attention is given to the optimal use of the by-products to increase production of electricity and ethanol where small planters will be adequately compensated, and will be able to sell the energy they produce through bagasse to the grid of the Central Energy Board.

It will be another step towards democratisation of the economy.

The Green Building Initiative is being aggressively pursued.

We are witnessing a dramatic change in the way that Governments value their ecosystems. At the recent meeting on biodiversity in Japan, the World Bank launched its programme to help nations put a value on nature just like the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

As reported recently, the five-year pilot project backed by India, Mexico and other nations aims to embed nature into national accounts to draw in the full benefits of the services, such as coastal protection from mangroves or watersheds for rivers that feed cities and crops.

Here, in Mauritius, we have already – with the help of the Agence Française de Développement - Et là, je voudrais remercier la nouvelle directrice de l'Agence Française de Développement, Madame Laurence Breton Moyet et son prédécesseur Monsieur Michel Gauthey pour l'aide financière et leur assistance technique. Si l'AFD est présente à Maurice aujourd'hui c'est grâce au Président Jacques Chirac que j'ai rencontré durant ma visite officielle en France en 2006. Le Président Chirac a demandé à l'AFD de revenir à Maurice - we have worked together on the Green Accounting Approach whose particular strength is that, it measures the environmental cost caused by economic activity.

Green Accounting also assesses the contribution of biodiversity to the economic life and to the well-being of our citizens.

Mauritius has moved from 58th in 2008 to 6th in 2010 in the World Economic Forum Environmental Performance Index. We are first in Sub Saharan Africa.

This did not happen by itself – I say it to those who say MID is just a slogan ! – But everyone has to do his or her share and not just expect handouts.

We can be an example to the world ! The message to the whole world is if we can, you can. The "Urgency of NOW" is imperative if we are to safeguard our environment. All Mauritians must come together and rally behind the MID initiative and be part of this national effort to put our country on the path of irreversible sustainable development.

I have said on many occasions that economic growth for the sake of growth is meaningless. What is meaningful, is growth that will result in a better quality of life for our people.

I am optimistic about rallying the whole nation in support of this visionary project.

We need to move to the second phase of the MID project. We have built the foundation. We must now have a clear action plan and a road map for the journey ahead.

I am well aware, that there is need for well-planned co-ordination.

I propose to set up a Strategic Committee consisting of the public and the private sector together with stakeholders in civil society.

That is what participative democracy is about.

We also need to have an Evaluation Committee consisting of scientists and economists and other professionals which can evaluate and follow up on the projects submitted.

And I intend to have a Mr MID so that he can oversee the whole project and report to my Office.

And we have this ideal person – it is Mr Osman Mahomed.

I strongly believe that we are on the right path.

We now need to move to the next phase and galvanise the whole nation around this project.

A vision needs to be nurtured and pursued relentlessly for it to become reality.

It is in all our interests that we change our mindset, leave our comfort zones, forget the easy options and think in terms of sustainable development in unison, as one people.

Everyone in the world should pursue the same vision, for we have only one world – one home – our blue planet in the vast void of the universe.

When you look at the pictures of our planet from space you realise how fragile our home planet is.

It is up to all of us to ensure its survival.

And I am confident, that the human spirit of survival will prevail.

Before concluding, I would like to thank the Steering Committee on MID, the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and the Agence Française de Développement for organising this workshop. I also thank all the other development agencies notably the European Union, UNDP and other stakeholders for their continued assistance.

I would also like to thank my Special Adviser, Professor Joel de Rosnay and Mr Osman Mahomed for believing in the vision and giving the best of themselves to turn the vision into reality.

To make a dream come true you must first have the capacity to dream.

I am now pleased to declare the workshop open.

I thank you for your attention.

Area is Locked

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