

***Speech by Honourable Devanand Virahsawmy***

***Minister of Environment & Sustainable Development***

***Opening of the Maurice Ile Durable Consultative Workshops***

***14 June 2011***

***Venue: La Grande Cannelle, Domaine Les Pailles***

H.E. Mr Alessandro Mariani Ambassador of the European Union

Representative of the UNDP

Representative of the Agence Française de Développement

Mr Osman Mohamed Chairman of the MID Steering Committee

Mr Seebaluck Officer in Charge of the Ministry of Environment & S.D.

Distinguished Guests,

Dear Participants

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure to be in your midst today on the occasion of the opening ceremony for the launching of the Maurice Ile Durable Consultative Workshops. As sustainable development is a human centered development, the involvement of all key stakeholders and of the population at large is of paramount importance. On this line allow me to quote, The Honourable Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, who stated that *“the Maurice Ile Durable Project is a social project which belongs not to its conceptors or to Government but to the whole Mauritian nation”*. (End of quote)

In line with this democratic tradition, we have consulted the civil society for the elaboration of a MID vision and to-day we are initiating a new consultative process through a series of workshops, whereby you will be able to present your views, your suggestions and your aspiration to make Mauritius a model in sustainable development. The main objective is to

come up with concrete proposals, which will eventually feed in the development of a consolidated MID Policy, a ten year Strategy and Action Plan for the Republic of Mauritius.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

For many years, Mauritius has been known as a Paradise Island, an example of harmonious social development, economic miracle as well as environmental achievement. However, given the numerous global challenges, the projected increase in intensity of natural disasters and the increasing incidence of manmade disasters, resulting in ozone depletion, we need to rethink our development model to remain on the sustainable pathway. As such we require to adjust and, where required, consider a deep transformation of our environmental, economic and social landscape, in line with the vision of the Prime Minister for a “Maurice Ile Durable”.

Here, I would like to quote the UN Under Secretary General Sha Zukang, who at the recent UN Meeting of the Rio+20 said that :

*“If we continue on our current path we will bequeath material and environmental poverty, not prosperity, to our children and grand-children. Only sustainable development can provide durable solutions to the crisis.”*

(End of quote)

The concept of sustainability emerged from a series of meetings and reports during the 1970's and 1980's. The UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 marked the first great international meeting on how human activities were harming the environment and putting humans at risk. In 1987, the Brundtland Report represented a major

paradigm shift in the global discourse on development and environment. It was argued that the only way to achieve environmental sustainability is through economic growth.

However “sustainable development” *per se* emerged in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. It is at that meeting that “sustainable development” was born, containing the three pillars – environmental, social and economic issues – that are inherently inter-linked in a balanced and integrated manner. Mauritius played a key role at that conference and was the first nation to sign the Rio Conventions, including those on climate change and biodiversity.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Despite our inherent vulnerabilities as a Small Island Developing State and the global challenges that Mauritius is facing, we have maintained good progress and achieved good scores with regard to our economic, social and environmental development. We are among the few countries in Africa on track to meet the majority of our Millenium Development Goals by 2015 and the Environmental Performance Index bears testimony. Recently Prof Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize Winner quoted ‘The Mauritius Miracle’ in his article.

We have today the necessary legal and institutional framework for the protection of the environment. We are in the process of continuously enhancing it. We have an approved National Environmental Policy, a National Environmental Strategy. We are also implementing an Integrated Coastal Zone Management Framework and we have policies for protecting our Environmentally Sensitive Areas like wetlands, forests, islets, natural

habitats and other important ecosystems. At the same time my Ministry is implementing a series of Sustainable Consumption and Production projects, including eco-villages.

Regarding the global challenges such as climate change and inter-linked drought and desertification as well as loss of biodiversity, My Ministry has already embarked on a comprehensive adaptation programme in the form of the Africa Adaptation Programme (AAP). To that effect, a Climate Change Division has been set up within the Department of Environment of my Ministry.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

True it is that economic indicators show that we are on the right path but this should not be an end in itself. We have to prevent mutually disruptive development applying the concepts of sustainable development in all our major sectors. Indeed misguided sectoral policies can defeat the overall goals of sustainable development. We all know from past experience that the blind pursuit of only economic development may degrade the resources available. This is particularly true for tourism and agricultural development.

We have now reached, through the publication of the Green Paper prepared by Prof Odendaal, the stage of a MID Vision which we all aspire. It is now imperative to move one step further to pave the way for the sustainable development of Mauritius. Accordingly, the Government is embarking on the MID process that will enable the development of a consolidated Policy, a 10-year Strategy and an Action Plan, by inter alia taking into consideration the Green Paper.

The main thrust of this new process lies in the setting up of 6 thematic Working Groups to work out on the following themes, covering the 5Es of MID, namely Energy, Environment, Education, Employment and Equity. Two working groups have been set up for the Environment Sector. The working groups comprise a balanced representation of members from Government, NGO's, Trade Unions, Private Sector and Persons knowledgeable in the field.

The Working Groups will take into consideration the National MID Vision, and come up with concrete recommendations, which will feed in the process of formulation of the MID Policy, Strategy and Action Plan which will be entrusted to a team of consultants. This Action Plan is expected to be ready by early 2012 whereby relevant Ministries and stakeholders would have their own priority projects to be implemented based on sectoral policies and strategies.

The Action Plan will also include recommendations for an appropriate institutional and legislative framework for sustainable development to ensure smooth implementation of the priority actions identified.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

For a successful MID Policy, Strategy and Action Plan, there is need for ownership and commitment. It is therefore imperative to have the active collaboration and effective participation of relevant Ministries and Stakeholders for a coordinated approach. The ultimate objective is to see how together as one team and one nation, we can forge and achieve our goal of a "Maurice Ile Durable".

I am convinced that the consultative workshop will inspire collaboration and dialogue among various stakeholders present. With these words I wish you all fruitful interactions. I now have the pleasure to declare the workshop open.

I thank you for your kind attention.

*D.V.*