

Second Reading

THE MAURITIUS FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE BILL

(No. X of 2013)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Ministry of Local Government & Outer Islands (Mr H. Aimée): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I move that the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill be read a second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am indeed very pleased to present to the House today the new Fire and Rescue Service Bill. This Bill goes in line with the waves of modernisation over which our country is surfing today. Before commenting on the major reforms in the fire services sector that the new legislation is purporting to bring about, allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to highlight the guiding principles and philosophy underlying the preparation of the new Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Fire Services, as established under the Fire Services Act 1954, are entrusted with the duty of extinguishing fires and protecting life and property in case of fire throughout the Republic of Mauritius. Over the years, the Fire Services have been centralised and consolidated into the Government Fire Services, which currently operates as a department, under the aegis of my Ministry. To date, the Government Fire Services has been performing its main duty of extinguishing fires but has concurrently developed an effective fire prevention, mitigation and management system. It has also been providing, on numerous occasions, rescue services on a voluntary and humanitarian basis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, our Fire Services, nowadays, is being driven and shaped, like all fire services around the world by the rapid changes taking place in its operating environment. These changes relate, on the one hand, to the nature, complexity and magnitude of hazards and risks, brought by new types of materials and industrial processes and, also, more sophisticated architecture and infrastructure linked to urbanisation. On the other hand, they are the result of the increasing demands and expectations of the different stakeholders in our society.

Thus, in order to address new challenges and inherent dangers, the Government Fire Services has gradually evolved from its primary mandate of extinguishing fires to become an “All-Hazard” response agency. Its mission of saving life, protecting property and the

environment requires fire-fighters to attend to fire outbreaks, flooding incidents, landslides, tsunamis, industrial accidents, chemicals incidents, oil spills, aircraft incidents, road traffic accidents, technical rescues and other types of man-made and natural disasters.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Government Fire Services is at the forefront today in building safer, stronger and more resilient communities, through better emphasis on prevention, education and emergency preparedness. It has an on-going programme to inform and educate our communities about the measures they need to take to prevent fires and accidents from occurring in the first place, as well as measures which they can take to limit the destructive potential of such incidents on human life, property and the environment.

The Government Fire Services currently operates 9 fire stations, manned by about 650 fire-fighters working on 4 shifts, and provides fire and emergency cover for the whole country. With a population of about 1.2 million, we thus have a fire-fighter-to-population ratio of 1 fire-fighter on-duty for every 7400 in population. The Service has a fleet of about 30 fire fighting vehicles and responds to an annual average of 5000 – 6000 fires and about 2000 non-fire incidents.

The Control and Mobilizing Centre, located at the Government Fire Services Headquarters in Port-Louis, receives all incoming emergency calls on hotline 115, dispatches fire crews to incidents and monitors management of operations on incident grounds.

The Fire Prevention Unit carries out inspection of buildings, filling stations, fuel depots, gas installations, office and commercial buildings, places of public entertainment, and other premises prone to fire hazards throughout the island for the purpose of fire certification and registration. In addition, the Unit conducts fire safety educational programmes for various categories of target groups, including workers, students and citizen groups.

This being said, it is clear that the Government Fire Services has been performing and delivering services to the community that exceeds by far the provisions of the 1954 Fire Services Act. There is therefore a need, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the fire legislation to be re-engineered completely in order to capture properly the full scale of activities of the Fire Services and also to respond to the growing and changing needs of modern Mauritius.

In this context, Government has proposed in its Programme for 2010-2015, to undertake a full review of the fire and rescue emergency cover across the whole country, to enhance the rescue capability of the Government Fire Services to deal with more complex incidents, and, to review the fire safety legislation. Subsequently, in the Government

Programme 2012-2015, mention was made about the introduction into the National Assembly of a new Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill. The Bill being presented today bears testimony that this Government actually lives up to its promises.

The main objectives of the new Bill are to define, within legal parameters, the roles and functions of the Government Fire Services with respect to prevention of and response to fires and other incidents, and to enhance co-ordination and working relationships among emergency organisations. To this end, my Ministry and the Fire Services Department have engaged in consultations with a large number of public bodies, including the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment, the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Protection, the Commissioner of Police, the Information and Communication Technologies Authority, the Central Water Authority, the Central Electricity Board and the Conservator of Forests. The outcome of the wide consultations has been embodied in the Bill which is now before the Assembly.

The main changes being brought to the legislation through the new Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill include –

New Appellation

The Government Fire Services is being renamed as the “Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service”, in order to encompass the core duties and functions of the Service, that is, response to fires and provision of rescue services. Some of us may recall the disastrous explosion of the Mauritius Chemicals and Fertilisers Industry in 2000, or the chemicals spills at Mare Tabac in 2009 where the fire-fighters were actively involved to mitigate damages to life, property and the environment. Most of us will never forget the horrendous flooding incidents following ex-Cyclone Lola in 2008 and, more recently, the two events of torrential rains earlier this year where our courageous fire-fighters have brought priceless contribution in avoiding greater loss of lives. The House will also appreciate the laudable support of the Service in rescue operations such as extrication of victims trapped in major road accidents like the very sad event which occurred recently at Sorèze.

Legal provision has also been made for the Service to participate in national schemes for the management, prevention, mitigation and reduction of disasters and to assist the National Disaster and Operations Coordination Centre set up by Government to ensure timely

disaster management response. Already, the Government Fire Services is a major player in the Cyclone and Other Natural Disaster Scheme, the Port Disaster Management Plan, the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan. A National Hazardous Materials (Hazmat) Response Plan is currently being finalised.

Working Agreement

Provision has been made in the Bill for the working agreement to be made, with the approval of the Minister, between the Service and any relevant organisation such as the Police, the Central Water Authority or the Mauritius Ports Authority, to promote mutual assistance in case of a specific emergency. It is to be noted that there already exists an Agreement between the Government Fire Services and the Airports of Mauritius Ltd. regarding emergency response in the event of on-airport and off-airport aircraft accidents and other emergencies in the perimeter of the airport.

Operation of Service

The Bill lays down clearly the parameters in which the Service shall operate in order to fulfil its duties and functions under the Act. For example, some additional powers being given to the Service under the Bill include –

- to make use of recording equipment for recording every alarm call and related outgoing call;
- to make use of any fire extinguishing materials or other resources, whether public or private, for the purpose of its functions;
- to authorise burning under certain conditions. This would apply to non-domestic purposes such as agricultural fires and burning of obsolete confidential documents, and
- to enable an authorised officer of the Service to search, inspect any record, book, document or thing and to seize any equipment where he has reasonable ground to believe that the equipment does not comply with the Act or any guidelines issued by the Chief Fire Officer. The power of entry and seizure would only be effective upon a warrant being issued by a Magistrate for the purpose.

Powers of Minister

The Bill includes a section on the powers of the Minister responsible for the subject of fire. This provision is meant to ensure that the programmes, measures and actions taken by the Service are in line with the vision and policies of Government insofar as public safety is concerned and also to convey the idea of effective stewardship. In particular, the Bill empowers the Minister to –

- define, in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer and other relevant authorities, the broad policy of the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service;
- in the event that the Service fails to act in compliance with the broad policy mentioned above, give a direction to the Service to comply with that policy, in order to promote public safety, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the Service, and
- place a duty on the Service to respond to a particular type of emergency, not specifically referred to under the Act.

These powers are similar, but not as extensive to those given to the Secretary of State responsible for Fire Services in the United Kingdom.

Duties of Stakeholders

The current Fire Services Act requires the Police to inform promptly the Service upon being itself informed of the outbreak of a fire and provide all necessary assistance to the fire officer in charge on the emergency site. The Bill is extending similar duties to other stakeholders such as the Central Water Authority, the Central Electricity Board and other energy distributors and suppliers.

Fire Prevention, Fire Safety Plans and Fire Certificate

The Bill contains a number of general clauses pertaining to fire prevention, fire safety and fire certificate. The provisions pertaining to the fire prevention and the fire certificate have up to now been governed by the Occupational Safety & Health Act (OSHA) 2005, which is an anomalous situation as they pertain to the core duties of the Government Fire Services. Furthermore, it is to be noted that this Act covers only buildings being used as places of work. Thus, consequential amendments are being brought to the Occupational

Safety & Health Act in order to streamline, under one piece of legislation, the issue of fire certificate for all premises, including buildings used as places of work.

Volunteer Fire Brigades

The Bill caters for the possibility of setting up Volunteer Fire Brigades to promote community participation and ensure promptness in response and better coverage in case of emergencies. Volunteer fire brigades will be set up according to established criteria and will be provided training and protective equipment by the Service. It is proposed to proclaim this section only when the relevant criteria for enlistment of volunteers and the *modus operandi* of the Volunteer Fire Brigades would have been duly established, through regulations, to be made under the new Act.

Training Facilities

The Bill highlights the importance of training to firefighters and provides for the establishment of training centres for the purpose. Furthermore, to ensure quality and appropriateness of training dispensed by private parties, the Bill places an obligation on any person providing training in fire safety to be registered with the Fire Service and with the Mauritius Qualifications Authority.

Firefighting or Fire Warning Equipment

In order to ensure maximum protection to the public, the Bill provides that no person shall import, sell, supply, install or maintain firefighting or fire warning equipment unless such equipment complies with standards to be prescribed.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the new Bill is, in fact, a legal tool to facilitate the firefighters in the performance of their actual duties and functions. Over and above the legal framework, I wish to highlight some of the areas where this Government has taken important measures to improve the firefighting and rescue cover of the country. I have also, personally, since my taking office as Minister, given special attention to build up the capacity of the Government Fire Services and enhancing the work conditions of our brave firemen.

Amongst others,

- Government has undertaken to construct four new Fire stations at Tamarin, Rose-Belle, Montagne Blanche and Goodlands during the coming years. The one at

Tamarin is currently under construction and the station to become operational within three months.

- Five modern water tenders for a contract value of approximately Rs60 m. have been acquired in the year 2011. These vehicles are fully equipped with a large range of firefighting and rescue equipment such as pumps, water monitors, rescue gears, breathing apparatus and ladders designed to the highest standards.
- A modern aerial turntable ladder has been delivered in January 2013 for the sum of Rs35 m. to equip the Fire Service for attending fires and also perform rescue activities in high rise buildings.
- The updating and upgrading of the radio communication network have been completed in December 2011 at the cost of Rs9.1 m.
- As from this year, the Government Fire Services has decentralised its fire prevention service, which includes the inspection of premises and the issue of Fire Certificates in respect of building premises and Certificates of Registration for storage and transportation of inflammable liquids and substances.
- In November 2011, the Fire Prevention Unit has been awarded ISO 9001:2008 certification.
- 9 posts of Senior Station Officers were created and filled in August 2011.
- 83 posts of firefighters have been filled since January 2012, including 5 female firefighters.
- An additional batch of 37 temporary firefighters have been recruited in April this year and are currently undergoing training.
- The PRB Report and the EOAC Report have both recommended the setting up of a “Bank of Fire Officers Scheme”, the payment of night duty allowance and the payment of Risk Allowance to operational staff. This has been realised with my personal support and that of the management.
- A plot of land has been identified at Riche Terre for the setting up of a Fire and Rescue Training Academy.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the existing Fire Services Act, though proclaimed in May 1954, was actually Act No. 56 of 1953. The Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill 2013, therefore, is the first major change in legislation in this sector in 60 years. My earnest wish is that this Bill will allow the forthcoming Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service, to face the challenges of the modern world and contribute to make modern Mauritius a safe place for visitors, businesses and the public at large.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with these words, I commend the Bill to the House.

Dr. A. Boolell rose and seconded.

(5.17 p.m.)

Mr D. Nagalingum (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Fire Services is a fundamental and integral part of our public services aimed at keeping our communities safe and secure. It is a service that prevents fire, protects people, properties and businesses from fire risks and which respond to fire, road traffic collisions, flooding and other emergencies for the benefit of one and all. But there is no denying that the Fire Services do now need to undergo a radical transformation so as to adapt itself to the completely different realm of risk in which they now evolve. It is obvious that without major reforms, the fire services which had played and is still playing a crucial role in the safety sector in Mauritius, moving from a preponderantly emergency response service to one that provides services and assistance in almost all cases of emergencies, which not be able to preserve its credential in the future.

As such, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let me at the very outset make it clear that we, on this side of the House, do not find the adoption of the present Bill as objectionable. However, I remain convinced that had there been proper consultation with the relevant stakeholders, my information is that such has not been the case. A comprehensive plan for the fire and emergency sector, a better piece of legislation would have been brought in front of this House today, but the facts remain that for reasons known only to the hon. Minister of Local Government, unfortunately, there have been no consultations with stakeholders, especially with representatives of trade union of Fire Services despite their request for same, whilst, on the other hand, it is more than obvious that this Government is trying to govern through project rather than through long-term strategic plan.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with the adoption of the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill, Government intends to make better provisions and responds to fires and other incidents likely to endanger persons, animals, properties or the environment. Besides, this is clearly what is spelt out in the Explanatory Memorandum of this Bill. This is highly commendable. But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one should not lose sight of the fact that the degree of efficiency of an organisation in the delivery of its services is directly proportional to the skill of those forming part of that organisation. Thus, training is the key.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the purpose of this Bill, the Fire Services Act is repealed and this new Bill is being introduced, so that, fire services will, from now on, cater for rescue service also. Noble aspirations! But what about training for the firefighters with regard to the delivery of these new services? This is one of the reasons why I insist that much confusion could have been avoided through consultation with the stakeholders. Clause 5, paragraph 2 (g) provides that the service should -

- (g) cooperate with any entity that provides a service in case of emergency, including intervention at sea;

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are the firefighters trained for such an intervention? Such intervention requires high skill and technique and it would have been most appropriate to arrange for proper training of our firefighters prior to the introduction of this Bill in front of this House. True it is that clause 22 of the Bill provides for training facilities, but it seems like putting the horse before the cart. It would have been more logical to give out training to the firefighters prior to introducing this Bill before the House so that at proclamation of this Bill we would already have a well trained fire and rescue service.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, along with training, the issue of equipment is equally wholly relevant. What about equipment? Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can you imagine firefighters making an intervention at sea with fire tunics, leggings and fire boots? In such a scenario, this House will have to adopt another Bill to provide for the setting up of another service to save our firefighters at sea. I know that the Minister might consider my apprehension as trivial issues but how will I know what he has in mind as far as the implementation of this Bill is concerned? This is precisely the type of questions that the firefighters are asking themselves. But the Minister has chosen to bring this Bill in the most unilateral way with an uttered disregard to the request of consultation with firefighters through their Trade Union. This is a question of choice and management style but does it help in anyway? I'll leave this question

to the apprehension of this House. It is right that every avenue be exploited to deliver the best efficient service to communities, but we need to do this in the context of a nationally coherent service. And for an organisation to deliver coherent service, it must consist of properly trained people and adequate human resources.

The very fact that the fire services will now have to shoulder additional responsibilities implies that more people will be required to help delivering an efficient service. How will Government tackle this issue? Does the Minister intend to recruit new staff for the service? This is the logical way forward, but as far as I can recall, the previous budget is very silent on the issue of human resources or recruitment in fire services. Worse, not a single word was spelt out on the fire services, and now we are asked to support a Bill aiming to revitalise the fire services. I find this situation quite paradoxical to say the least.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said earlier, I find it highly commendable to aim at transforming our fire services into an efficient service, but efficiency is surely not achieved by rebranding or changing the name of an organisation nor does it just mean doing the same for less. But efficiency may be achieved by doing the same activity differently, by ensuring that the new service is not an expensive one, that the question of matching resources to risk is properly tackled and that public funds are judiciously spent. But, unfortunately, this Bill makes no provision for any mechanism which may promote the judicious use of public funds.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, God knows how many cases of wasteful use, misappropriation or rather pillaging public funds are related to fire services. I will take a few examples if you allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. With a view to upgrading the fire services, Government approved, in June 1998, the purchase of a hydraulic platform to be used for firefighting in high-rise buildings of a maximum height of 54 metres. The then Government requested the fire services to initiate early actions and the aerial ladder platform was delivered sometimes later and cost Rs29 m. Where is that platform today? It is lying somewhere and will eventually be disposed as *vieux ferrailles*. A turn table ladder at the cost of Rs35 m. - we have just heard the hon. Minister said it - has been purchased. Has anyone in this House ever seen the truck in action? No. Not even during the recent flooding. This is also kept pour *les décors* in Coromandel.

According to my information, four officers have received the proper training from a German Technician to operate this equipment, but they have been forbidden from operating it for unknown reasons. Perhaps the Minister can inquire and enlighten us on this issue. Why

these four people cannot operate the truck or rather why only four officers? In less than three months, three trucks of the fire services *se sont renversés* and they may be declared as total loss. The total sum of money involved here is around Rs25 m. without taking into account a truck which was purchased at Rs21 m. and which was involved in an accident in Fond du Sac in 2006. This truck has already been declared as total loss. I agree Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, these are accident cases, but the reason of the accident may well be due to lack of training of the drivers. That is why I stated earlier that training has a vital role to play in the enhancement of the efficiency of the service.

Just on a different tag, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the fire services carry out home and industrial fire safety checks with a view to making our homes and commercial and industrial buildings safer by identifying potential risks and drawing up fire escape plans. As a result, a reduction in fire risk incidents is being noted. This is certainly due to the action of the fire services and also due to technological improvements. Nevertheless, I believe that safety campaigns and Government regulations relating to electricity supply in buildings have also played a huge part. Thus, the application of stringent regulations and the holding of safety campaigns must be maintained at any cost. We must not lose sight of the importance of fire safety which has been responsible for the substantial progress we have made in reducing fires and deaths from fires. The new service which will be set up through the adoption of this Bill must be entrusted with the responsibility of holding awareness activities.

The new service which will be set up through the adoption of this Bill must be entrusted with the responsibility of holding awareness activities. The most effective way to save life is to prevent fires and other emergency incidents from occurring. The key to efficiency is prevention and protection work comes back to understand anguish and devising strategies to mitigate it. With the rapid urbanisation in every nook and corner of the country, safety campaign is of utmost importance while the response site of the Fire and Rescue Service should be universal. Prevention and protection is about targeting those areas, business people most at risk.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to address the issue of the powers of the Minister under this Bill. Clause 6 of the Bill - Working agreement provides and stipulates that –

‘6. Working agreement

- (1) The Service may, with the approval of the Minister, enter into, vary or revoke a working agreement with any relevant organisation or stakeholder for mutual assistance in case of a specific emergency.'

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Service will be headed by a Chief Fire Officer. He is a professional in this field. Why should he seek the approval of the Minister before entering or revoking a working agreement? It would be most appropriate to get him to discharge this responsibility in accordance with certain specific guidelines and parameters and to give him a free hand to handle such issues.

I am afraid that this may be devised allowing for putting square pegs in round holes in as much as this Bill provides for the setting up of volunteers fire brigades. Is this not a means to give way to the *'politique de petits copains'*? This sounds fishy. Proper caution should be exerted here when we know how contracts are being awarded here and there. Even in this House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you have witnessed Ministers admitting that contracts are being awarded to companies not having the skill to carry out the tasks they have been assigned for. I wish that the hon. Minister could enlighten us on this issue and, at the same time, elaborate on the issue of volunteers fire brigades which, I must admit, is a good thing provided it is implemented under specific parameters and guidelines.

Finally, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to lay emphasis on the fact that fire authorities, as a key part of the wider Local Government family, are providing themselves to be an efficient, accountable and trusted component of the public sector, but, as matters stand now, this service needs to be revamped and that does not only mean to bring a change of name. Adoption of a new Bill won't suffice. Adequate human resource and equipment, proper training, judicious use of funds, and incentives to fire-fighters are some of the elements which should be taken on board with a view to promote a more efficient service for the benefit of one and all.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(5.34 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment (Mr S. Mohamed): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have listened very carefully to hon. Nagalingum who

intervened on this piece of legislation. At one point of his intervention, he did say the following words, and that is what struck me, he said that -

“I leave that part of the Bill to the apprehension of the House.”

I gather it was a slip of the tongue, because if it was not a slip of the tongue, it is a very serious confession on the part of a Member of the Opposition: ‘I leave it to the apprehension of the House’; most probably, I would have thought he meant ‘I leave it to the appreciation of the House’, because if he meant ‘appreciation’ most probably it was a slip of the tongue that shows exactly what the Opposition is all about. That they are there to only surf and grow and blossom on the apprehension that they create in the minds of the public. I am very conscious about what I am saying and I confirm what I am about to say by substantiating it in the following manner. He says it that there should have been training before the Bill is brought to this august Assembly. I am but a layperson when it comes to the details and the fundamentals of fire training. I am no expert. I will never purport myself forward as being an expert in the field. Now, maybe hon. Nagalingum is an expert and, if he is, I bow to his expertise, but there is one thing that laymen should all be aware of. It is the following: ‘Training is not something that must be done prior to any *évènement* or even, after any *évènement*. Training is something that is a continuous process.’

When he goes on to say that there should be training, have we ever seen Fire Officers train for sea rescue? And, he goes as far as to say that this is not the case that they are not trained in sea rescue, it is shocking and surprising. I humbly put it that this is in violation of our Standing Orders. Our Standing Orders say: if a Member is to come to this House and say something, he should be ready to substantiate it. Is hon. Nagalingum, Member of the Opposition, ready to substantiate the fact that he says that fire training officers do not receive any training? Of course, he cannot, but it is this whole process of creating apprehension without any evidence whatsoever that they are so good at. Point that the hon. Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands will confirm later on; they have been following training sessions with the Mauritius Ports Authority, at the airport; like the coastguards, they have. To come here in a very simplistic manner in this august Assembly under the cover of the protection of this House, and diminish, ridicule the officers that go through training for sea rescue is very sad.

We should not, with the only objective of doing politics, score points on those Police Officers that allegedly have had no consultation with the hon. Minister of Local Government

and Outer Islands. That is also untrue. I, as Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment, know for a fact that there have been consultations. So, once again, can hon. Nagalingum come and substantiate the fact that he says: there have been no consultations? And, I say it for all to hear, here out loud, can hon. Nagalingum speaking for the Opposition qualify this Bill as a paradox and I qualify his speech as worse than a paradox because, at some point, he says he is agreeable with it. But then, again, just to be the typical Opposition that they are very good at criticisms and nothing else, he has to say: well there have been no consultations. Have we not heard many a time for various pieces of legislation this excuse that comes out of the Opposition? There has been no consultation. There should be more consultations. There should be consultations with a party that was not consulted and we are not happy with the type of consultation. They have always got something to say which is a lame excuse, in my humble view. You cannot be happy with what is provided for, but, at the same time, you go on to criticise, save and except, if the purpose of the criticism is only to score political points not to construct a better Fire and Rescue Service.

Now, they talk about Government trying to govern by project rather than by long-term strategic plan. Let's be serious. Is it the Opposition that kept on having '*comités corbeaux, lor comités corbeaux, on comités corbeaux*'. They are going to come and tell us on *chiens errants*. They are going to come and tell us how to run the country with a long-term vision. If it is a long-term vision that they had about the Mauritius Fire Services, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if it is all - maybe hon. Nagalingum is not aware - maybe other Members who were in Government at the time should, at least, brief him how many fire stations did they construct when they were in power between 2000 and 2005.

(Interruptions)

Let us be, at least, nice and not crush those who are already lying down on the floor. They are there lying down and bleeding away because they are aware that they have not built a single Fire Station between 2000 and 2005, and they are those who have the gall to come and give us lessons; amazing!

There is something else, which hon. Nagalingum said, that really shocked me. He said there is a high rise ladder that has been purchased and not been used! We have not seen it in action! Thank god, we have not seen it in action! Is this what the hon. Member is saying? He would feel better, as a Member of the Opposition, to have seen the 35 metre

ladder up in action, with a burning building? Then, the Opposition would have felt better. They would have said 'yes, we have seen it in action; it works.'

(Interruptions)

Don't talk about the floods. The floods are on the ground, not in the sky. Just because they have to criticise, the Opposition - they said it through their spokesman - would have been happy to see the 35 metre ladder in action. What would that mean? A burning building, live at risk! He would have been happy then. He would then have satisfied his sick curiosity. That is wrong!

(Interruptions)

The hon. Member had his chance! He lost it. The hon. Member had his chance! He crucified himself. The hon. Member had his chance! He condemned the Opposition. I am sorry! Once again, if you are seeing the *ébullition* et *l'opposition* right now, it is because they want to surf on the cadavers of people and do their politics. Dirty Opposition!

(Interruptions)

The Member of the Opposition, hon. Nagalingum, said something else. He said that the trucks overturn and there are accidents because of the lack of training that the drivers have. Does he have a report he can table to that effect? Does he have a report that can substantiate what he has just said? Or is that we come in this august Assembly and say whatever we want, in order for the members of the press to write it down and have headlines! If this is the purpose of the Opposition, then shame on them! Does the hon. Member have a report? Does the hon. Member have that report that he can enlighten the members of the press with? If he does not have that report, then I humbly submit that he should stand up on a point of personal explanation and withdraw that attack; baseless, shameful attack on the drivers of the fire services. I have seen fire trucks overturn in the United States of America. I have seen fire trucks overturn in Japan. I have seen them in London! I have seen them in Paris! Does that mean that they are not trained? But the only thing is that we don't have hon. Nagalingum in the *Assemblée* or the House of Commons to give his valuable remarks, insulting the trainers and the officers of the fire service. We are unique; we have an Opposition, and we have the spokesperson who will leave no stone unturned, not even being able to substantiate what he said, but he is going to say it. At least, let the members of the

press note that still there is silence here with regard to whether he can prove what he said or not. There is silence, and the silence means he cannot.

(Interruptions)

That is a stupid remark!

There is something else, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that I would like to say. The be all and end all of some people's life is politics. Some people's life is a question about to get elected and nothing else. As far as I am concerned, my mission here is not to get elected. My mission here is to serve the country.

(Interruptions)

They are not aware of the sacrifice. They are not aware of that. And you have a lot of jealousy. That's why jealousy makes them really talk. And then, again, they say 'when dog barks, I shall not stop, I will continue.' So, let them continue barking.

(Interruptions)

I have got a lot more to say. In 1953, when the Fire Services Bill was brought to this august Assembly...

(Interruptions)

Very interesting! How intelligent! Very intelligent! You are shining with intelligence!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Please, go ahead! Hon. Jhugroo!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Jhugroo, do not the interrupt the hon. Minister, please!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Jhugroo, please refrain from interrupting the hon. Minister!

(Interruptions)

Enough of it! Hon Assirvaden, please refrain from making any remark from a sitting position! Hon. Jhugroo!

Mr Mohamed: Some people think they know what God plans. They know better. They are in conversation with them. What is really interesting here is what happened in 1953, and I have to thank the hon. Minister of Local Government.

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would just like not to be interrupted by some, I don't know what it is, but it sounds like an empty drum running along.

The Deputy Speaker: Please, go ahead! I have already talked to him.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Patrick Assirvaden!

Mr Mohamed: In 1953, when in this august Assembly we heard this Bill being debated, one of the main issues - and hon. Aimée drew my attention to that - is whether or not in those days firefighters would be allowed to unionise. In those days, hon. Mohamed, hon. Ramgoolam, hon. Boolell - all of them - had only one thing in mind. One of the main issues many of the great stalwarts in history fought for was that they be allowed to unionise. When we talk today about the Mauritius Labour Party, represented here by the hon. Minister of Local Government, putting forward this Bill, the battle and the way we do business in this party has not changed. The same people in this House, in Government here, are coming with change - the only change that has been brought in the past 60 years - and those changes show only one thing: that we have had consultations. We think about the protection and the security of the inhabitants of our country and the users of the services. We want the firemen to feel more comfortable. It is also, not because of the public, but because of the request of the fire people working in the service, that there have been some changes brought about, and those changes are fundamental changes.

As far as I am concerned, when I go through the Bill of 1953, through the debates and the words, the way things were spoken in 1953, people may have not agreed with one another, but the great thing about 1953 is that there were no insults. What came first in their minds were the public. You may not have agreed with what was being proposed, but there

were no insults. There were no below the belt remarks, and true it is to say that we have a lot to learn from people in those days. When I say learn, I say we have a lot to learn from them.

Let me go on to say that when I, as Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment, stand up to talk about this Bill, it's precisely because one of the clauses of this Bill will bring some fundamental changes to the Occupational Safety and Health Act. A lot of the clauses are being amended. A lot of the clauses are being deleted - repealed - in the Bill, but we have worked in close collaboration with my colleague, hon. Minister of Local Government, and our main objective of working closely together was the following: that we come up with a better system. We have made things more disciplined; we have put things in their proper perspective and structure, and it is not necessary for me to go into all the very details. But then again, now, the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment will take care of work places, as far as the five issues are concerned. In collaboration, we will have the training that we have already done in the past. As far as the accommodation of workers is concerned, we will still continue working together. There are more than 1,163 lodging accommodation permits that have already been issued with the assistance of the Ministry and Department headed by my good friend, hon. Aimée, with the fire clearances and what have not.

In that perspective, I am of the view that this is an excellent piece of legislation. I wanted to say one thing with regard to the Bill, namely that I am totally happy about clause 12. Clause 12(3) of the Bill talks about 'every police officer present at the scene of a fire or other emergency shall assist every officer in the execution of his duty.'

Now, some people may think, well, why is this there? And clause 4, any Police officer may of his own motion, who, at the request of an authorised officer, close any road in the vicinity of the scene of any fire or emergency, what this Bill does in actual fact; because very far it is basically saying giving the power, you are empowering a Police officer to take it upon himself when he sees an emergency, on his own motion, he does not have to wait for the chain of command. He does not have to wait for superior officers to tell him that he is entitled. He does not any more have to give a phone call to someone to say: "May I do it with your permission?" He does not have to have a report from the Commissioner of Police, from the Deputy Commissioner of Police, from the Superintendent or the Inspector. He is a Police officer, he can take it upon himself to close any road in the vicinity of a scene of any fire and emergency to order, to withdraw people in a scene of a disaster; that is different.

I would like to congratulate the hon. Minister for having been so bold as to think about doing such a thing and I would therefore recommend - and this is my personal view - that the Police, not only in situations of fire and rescue service, but in all situations, should be able to circumvent something that slows matters down, which is the chain of command.

I am only here trying to be constructive, and I have hope that my last remark which is only there in order to help things go faster will make things better for the public and for the service in question.

Once again, I thank and congratulate my colleague, the hon. Minister of Local Government. One last remark I would like to say, when coming back to 1953 I would like to, once again, underline that in those days there may have been very short interventions, there may have been very short but very to the point and very sweet interventions. There were a lot of people who didn't agree with one another but, at no time did those hon. Members of those days, at no time did those gentlemen of those days - because they were that - do what some people of the Opposition do today.

Thank you very much.

(6.52 p.m.)

Mr J. F. François (Third Member for Rodrigues): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in participating in this Fire and Rescue Service Bill debate, I have a few tragic pictures flashing in my mind.

First, the fire that broke out in a nightclub in Brazil which resulted in more than 200 fatalities; the 11 September 2011 terrorist attacks in New York, the Christ Church earthquake in New Zealand, the Sorèze accident here, in Mauritius, and the recent flashfloods that hit Port Louis and the surroundings badly. We will recall the valuable presence and involvement of firefighters. It is a fact that every year many lives are saved and properties protected by professional and dedicated firefighters, who often have to deal with very challenging and dangerous situations of rescues to protect and help our community. *“Le sacrifice de soi pour la vie de l'autre est un plus beau métier” disait un sapeur-pompier.*

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we all owe these firefighters a huge debt of gratitude for the work that they do for our community. And allow me to thank and congratulate them for same, as well as the hon. Minister to come forward with this Bill.

The setting-up of a Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service will certainly reflect its role as one which offers services based on resources and skills similar to other fire and rescue services around the world. Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, firefighters throughout the world have been tasked with many responsibilities such as road accidents, emergencies, rescues, land and sea, building collapses, ambulance services - which I will come later on - and natural disasters caused by floods, cyclones in our country, chemical spills and others.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is clear today that the demand for an expectation from the fire and rescue services in our Republic will certainly increase as being influenced by a range of factors beyond their control, such as accidents as just mentioned, and our democratic situation and changes where more investments on property development and pressures on natural resources. For example, residential buildings in risky areas, as we have seen at Montagne Ory.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the introduction of this Bill does bring a positive look ahead, despite the fact that I am not quite sure whether there has been a full review through a comprehensive report with problems identified, potential and co-options assessment and recommendations drafted for the actual functioning of the service and also resources and funds requirement for a sustainable, stable and equitable fire service for our country.

In the 2013 Programme-Based Budgeting, the current establishment for fire rescue prevention provides for 717 officers. But, the hon. Minister just confirmed there are only 650 Fire Officers in post. For this year 2013, there are 756 for a population of 1,293,549 souls as at December 2012, that is, making a ratio as pointed out of a per capita of 0.4%, that is, one Firefighter per 1,700 residents, as rightly said by the hon. Minister and excluding the 900,000 tourists that visit us every year.

At present, there is no exact information of the number of volunteer fire brigades. However, clause 21 and clause 22 of the Bill show an important and commendable feature of the Fire and Rescue Services by providing for formation of volunteer firefighters. My question is: how are volunteers called to a scene? Will there be an independent means of communication? What about volunteers already in employment, should they request for leaves and wait for approval of same when they are called for an emergency scene?

As per clause 21(2), the Chief Fire Officer will define the number of volunteers for firefighters, but this is not clear whether it will be in relation to the number of fire stations or

demographic location or simply what is the criteria. In fact, the criteria have to be clear-cut as will be prescribed by regulation and as informed by the hon. Minister.

The provision as per clause 22(1) for the service to set up and maintain one or more training centers for providing education and training matters relating to instructions certainly substantiate the requirement for highly trained firefighters and rescuers. By the way, I appeal also for more women firefighters in the service. Five women out of 83 recruited, that makes only 0.06%, that is, less than 1% according to the recruitment exercises and that is not enough.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will recommend that the service shall formalise the voluntary training of every citizen and also competent authorities in the fire rescue and calamities. However, the policy for volunteer firefighters should not be a ground for not to recruit more firefighters and rescuers in the service.

In the case of Rodrigues, we must foresee the possibility of being struck seriously by an earthquake one day. I don't wish that to happen, but we need to foresee the future as there are frequent seismic activities around the island. In that line, being given the lack of training for the present firefighters in Rodrigues, I plead for the right training facilities for them, as well as a possibility of the recruitment of volunteer firefighters and rescuers for training.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to meet the exigencies of this new service role, the firefighters and rescuers will have to benefit from more advanced training in first aid, land, search and rescue, chemical incidents, road accidents, humanitarian related training and others. There should be more exchange training, for example, in floods, earthquakes, tsunamis calamities with countries like Japan, United States, Australia and Canada which have well-established and progressive training programmes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the people of our Republic including Rodrigues and Agaléga must feel safe in their knowledge that help is close at hand through an improved Fire Services. In that connection, specifically for Rodrigues, I will urge the Chief Fire Officer and other technical personnel to effect shortly a working visit to Rodrigues to meet the Chief Commissioner responsible for Fire Services as well as the officers of the Fire Department; the Rodrigues Police and other stakeholders such as Red Cross, the Scouts Association, Airport of Rodrigues Limited and the Port Authority to work out a memorandum of understanding in

a partnership perspective along with the Fire and Rescue Services in line with the with the autonomous status of Rodrigues.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from a practical point of view, as nothing is mentioned of the applicability of this legislation to Rodrigues, any reference in this Act is also a reference to the authority of the Fire Services in Rodrigues as is conferred by section 32 of the RRA. Section 32 of the RRA Act reads as follows –

‘32. References to Ministers and Departments

Any reference in any enactment or other document to -

(a) a Minister; or

(b) a government department,

whether by name or in general terms, shall, for the purpose or in consequence of the exercise by the Regional Assembly of any of its functions and duties in relation to Rodrigues, be construed as being or including a reference to the Regional Assembly.’

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, public education on fire hazards and safety shall become a continuous component of our community service. This will certainly pave the way towards placing a great emphasis on fire prevention and fire safety by raising community awareness through education. The Service will need to focus also on the responsibility of the future generation to learn from this present generation and then take it on for when one grows up to become a responsible citizen in our community and leader of tomorrow to make sure that we are all safe and that our committees can keep going on.

In that perspective, our Republic needs to create a resilient society towards any calamities or disasters when it comes to emergency through best practices in risk management by enhancing community resilience as rightly said and pointed out by the hon. Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, building community resilience is about providing our communities with the knowledge and right tools to reduce the risk of emergencies in the first place and to manage response to emergencies when they occur. I think we will all accept that our geographical position will cause us to continue to have cyclones, heavy rains, and that we have to live with them, and to prepare our community to face them.

Coming to road accidents, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir: road accidents are still worrying each one of us. Accidents will always happen and we have to be ready to help as quickly as we can. We need a safer society by preventing road accidents or fires happening. This is where more road safety campaigning on safe driving by Police, fire officers and others must be a continuous and well co-ordinated one as referred to in this Bill. The number of people killed or injured on the country's roads is still a concern for us today Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, and to keep us safe, we must have fire stations in the right place and fire-fighters with the right equipment and skills to do the job. Is it not important to consider the construction of many more fire stations despite those mentioned on the Government Public Investment Programme? In the same line, I appeal that Rodrigues also moves quickly into the construction of a new modern fire station in the centre of the island mainly near Malabar or Mont Lubin because there is only one fire station which is found at Port Mathurin and you imagine if something happens in the different locations of the island how long and how far those fire-fighters will have to travel.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as specified in the Explanatory Memorandum,

'The object of this Bill is to provide for the setting up of the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service –

- (a) (...);
- (b) to enhance coordination and harmonise working relationships among emergency organisations; and (...)'

This is needed for a better coordination between the Police, medical service, coasts guards and others in building a cohesive, equitable and unified workforce towards safer, efficient and effective services. Here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I believe that the Bill should also instigate the implementation of a national strategy mainly in terms of leadership for the Fire and Rescue Services. Why? Because the initial role of Fire and Rescue Services Officers and Fire Station Officers in promoting quality service is crucial to the service delivery. I recall, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when an Air Mauritius plane could not take off from Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International airport to fly to Rodrigues because there was a situation where the required number of fire officers were not present as a matter of sickness and other in-house problems which should not have arisen in any case. That happened, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?

Coming to equipment, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said education alone, however, is not the sole factor to influence fire service culture. Skills need to be supported by the necessary technical equipment to enable officers to carry out their tasks efficiently. In line with the setting up of the Fire and Rescue Services, while performing both fire and rescue services, there is need to be fully equipped to meet its full objectives and the operation of the Service as per section 7 which stipulates that –

‘7. Operation of Service

- (1) The Service shall use such equipment as may be required
(...)

From information I gathered the present equipment available are not enough to meet the exigencies of the service. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Service will now be called upon for expansion to include rescue mainly in seawater and underwater. The Service will have to be equipped with, for example, primary response vessels like rigid inflatable boats to perform the duties with other accredited services. Today, with the re-route of tankers and ships in our ocean water due to piracy, there are significant shipping risks along our coastal line where, at any time, an emergency at sea may be required maybe for aircraft incidents or any accidents at sea. I here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, call upon the hon. Minister as well as the Minister for Maritime and Ports to implement additional measures that improve all marine rescue and to ensure the provision of ongoing funding to support the future capital equipment purchases for the service.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is worth to note that the ports, both in Mauritius and Rodrigues, in general, are not fully equipped for the fire fighting at sea. These require more sophisticated and modern practical equipment. Here, for example, fire-fighters and rescuers require motorcycles equipped for fighting fires and emergencies. These can be used as a first Responder Unit. Motorcycles are commonly used, we know, like in Japan, Hong Kong, for example, in normal everyday duties and they easily negotiate, you know, the small streets and heavy traffics.

Coming to another point on equipment, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, equipment for evidence and IT: officers may sometimes face challenging situations while performing their duties leading to disputes or maybe court cases. In that case, other equipment for evidence like CCTV will have to be placed on some fire vehicles fitted with video cameras used to

record activities. They may also be fitted with sound recording facilities. These might be used for the protection of the officers or as evidence relating to the incident itself.

The Service will also have to be equipped with modern information technology such as a mobile data terminal, but it requires sound, reliable and dedicated wireless communication means to communicate with stations and between the units themselves. This will enable firefighters to call details such as incidence, maps of locations or zone. The Service also, from a technical point of view, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, shall be conversant with technology such as Geographical Information System that would provide an integrated collection updating processing and storage of events in real time. This is the way forward, modernising the service. This will enable also to enhance and coordinate responses to emergencies and to ensure an effective and provide information for rapid response. Going on GIS, the Geographical Information System, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the system should be the core component of the emergency response operational centre and the National Disaster and Operations Coordination Centre as mentioned. Here also, I add that another fundamental equipment requires by the Service for each interdependency is an ambulance service as it is practised internationally to offer the public in case of an emergency first aid treatment, for example, drug overdoses, poisonings, accident injuries, burns, smoke emanation and others in the event that a person could not walk and had to be conveyed to a hospital regardless the response from over medical services. This is where I suggest, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that in line with this new fire and rescue role operations the Service will need to acquire such amount of ambulances, as may be required, as part of its vehicular response apparatus in addition to other rescue resources supportive of a strategy to transform the Service into a real, modern, responsive institution.

Coming to funding, after having said so about equipment, certainly, this Bill is a big call for my good friend, the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, who is not present, to earmark a few more millions in the coming budget for the purchases of more fire and rescue equipment and building more fire stations while the Fire and Rescue Services moves towards this modern institution.

Another important point which I want to raise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the execution of the duties of the service with regard to Media Management. As per clause 6 of the Bill, there is a working agreement. In clause 5 Duties and powers of Service, in clause 11 Command and control and in clause 12 Duties of police officers - well raised by hon Mohamed. Nothing defines Media Management with regard to this Bill. Why? Because it

appears that the Bill falls short to provide a media plan, nor details of who is responsible for briefing the media in case of emergencies, where both Police, fire rescue officers or others are present on a scene of accident or any calamities. Here, I am referring also in emergencies where the National Disaster and Operations Coordination Centre is not being covered by such emergencies, because it says in clause 11(3) of the Bill, Command and Control. In the event of a multiagency progress funds, the authorised officer, that is, the fire officer, highest in the rank on the site, shall take command in accordance with a new working agreement or emergency plan. My questions are: who will be the contact person for the media during the course of emergency on site? Who will set up facilities for the media? Who will organise media interviews and times and location? Who will all log contacts for media personnel to include names, stations from radio/TVs, newspapers, details of query, time, date, query and action and so on, because this is a very important part of this Media Management Plan with regard to dissemination of information.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the lack of such definition may lead to confusion and in some cases contradictory or incorrect information being given to the media.

I believe that the Bill shall clearly define in specific circumstances, who shall be the spokesperson unless a code of practice will be established and to provide for media training for officers who regularly must deal with media and journalists. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I recommend that media spokesperson, according to law, be appointed and that appropriate training be given. Ideally, all officers from the rank of station officers upward should receive this media training. This would enable each station to have its own media liaison officer who would be able to liaise and facilitate with the media during an emergency situation. He or she would act as an intermediary between the spokesperson, the media police and others, to ensure that facts, as I said, are not misrepresented in media report for the general public at large.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have a few more questions, particularly in this Bill, with regard to protection of the firefighters, with regard to whether firefighters are personally liable if something goes wrong while in service. What is the legal protection of fire officers if things, unfortunately, go wrong during a rescue or emergency?

Coming to the powers of Minister, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, clause 8 gives plenty of powers to the Minister in defining the broad policy. Clause 8 subclause 1(a) refers to the

responsibility of the Minister for defining the broad policy to be followed by the Service where in subclause (c)

“(...) the Minister may consult –

- (i) the Chief Fire Officer or his representative;
- (ii) persons considered by the Minister to represent employees of the Service;
- (iii) such other persons as he considers appropriate.”

As I said, this clause gives plenty of powers to the Minister. I believe in a more democratic way that there should have been the establishment of an Emergency Service Advisory Council to advise the Minister, through an acceptable appointment procedures, for its members. This is how I see it.

However, coming to the power of seizure and powers supporting seizure for firefighter officers, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Bill gives power of entry under clause 7 subclause 4(b) for fire fighters, but do not provide for power to seize and powers supporting seizure where this leads me to raise a few questions. My first question is: what shall an authorised fire officer who enters the premises do where any evidence may be seized from the premises if the authorised officer reasonably believes the thing is evidenced of an offence against this act and the seizure is necessary to prevent the thing being hidden, lost or destroyed. Further, what happens to the forfeiture of seized things? Shall be forfeited to the State if the authorised officer who seizes the things cannot find its owner after making reasonable enquiries?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, another technical query is, if the Chief Fire Officer is satisfied that a licence building is an at risk licensed building or overcrowding, is he mandated to take action to issue an at risk occupancy in relation to Fire Safety Plans.

Another point, injunctions where the fire officer is satisfied in relation to any building that the risks to persons in the event of fire or in the event of hazardous materials, emergency or the risks of spread of fire is so serious that the use of the building should be prohibited or restricted until steps have been taken to reduce the risk to a reasonable level. My question is whether the Chief Fire Officer is entitled by action such as an injunction in the Supreme Court may claim against the occupier of a building an injunction prohibiting or restricting the use of a building.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think I won't go any further over technical questions regarding this present Fire and Rescue Service Bill, I will conclude by saying, I do support the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill towards its modernisation to protect and save life together with a few questions as I raised for further clarifications for a more effective and efficient service.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank you for your attention.

(6.20 p.m.)

The Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives (Mr J. Seetaram): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me, at the outset, to convey my sincere thanks and congratulations to my colleague, the hon. Minister for Local Government, for his **proactiveness** and foresight in introducing this Bill to the House.

This Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is about two limbs. On one side, we have fire prevention and on the other side we have fire response. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the aim of this Bill, as stressed by my colleague, is, firstly, to make provision for better prevention of fire and also to respond better to fire outbreaks. Concerning the Bill itself, one would tend to think that prevention is the order of the day and, therefore, the saying: 'prevention is better than cure' has been well elaborated. It also makes provisions for mass sensitisation and mass community awareness concerning fire prevention.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have it from the Opposition that, at the first place, there has been no consultation in relation to this Bill. Therefore, there were also other disagreements concerning misappropriation of funds and other views in relation to fire equipment, whereas if one looks at the Bill, it would tend to lean towards the aspect of public safety, saving lives, public interests instead of fire equipment as a whole.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have from the Bill itself a very sensible and timely aspect. No one would argue and no one would oppose the blatant reality that today we are facing climate changes. Climate change is a live issue today. And due to climate changes, we have had several calamities, several changes in our habits, several environmental changes, new types of calamities like fast floods, new types of sea surges, outbreaks of fire on mountains and hills and new types of storms and hurricanes. This Bill also distinguishes

itself from the Bill of 1954 inasmuch as it does not limit itself to fire, it goes far beyond. It goes straight away to fire rescue and public safety.

In relation to the arguments put forward by the Opposition concerning no consultation has been made, I am advised that there was consultation, the firefighters union was consulted through meetings and this was held at the Ministry. This Bill came for the First Reading a few weeks back whereas we did not have any views that came forward, neither did we have any concrete proposal from the Opposition. Further, this Bill is coming with several aspects, as I have said, the aspect of prevention and response, but it also touches the aspect of emergency which is very important and very serious. Emergency is described as serious, unexpected and potentially dangerous occurrences such as fire, floods, storms, explosions, landslides, terrorist acts, accidents, sea surges on land, leakage of harmful substances or oil spill. How do we combat all that? This Bill takes care of such emergencies. It is very important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

All these situations call for immediate and coordinated response. This can only be catered for *via* a structured planning and a structured legislation has been laid down in this Bill. In order to minimise the loss of lives, to reduce property damages where possible, this Bill has made provisions for that. We also have to think that the last Bill was in 1954 and after 60 years, this Bill is coming forward and I believe it is a very good time to say that this Bill is the description itself of *gouverner c'est prévoir*. One should make sure to have the appropriate tools to be able to make it happen. It also sends a strong signal that in cases of emergencies of natural calamities, natural disasters and fire, preparation itself is half of the battle won. The hon. Minister of Local Government has really tackled all the necessary points mainly concerning advising the public on prevention of fire outbreaks, preventive measures and protection of property to avoid property damages.

Concerning clause 17 - fire prevention, it is well laid down. Clause 17(3) speaks of prevention of fire on premises and it is a very well laid down procedure. Now, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it has been put in the Bill and this would be voted to be law very soon. I congratulate the hon. Minister for that. Secondly, it has also included fire safety plans, again, responses to fire and evacuation plans as stipulated by clause 18(2)(a).

Further, there are procedures for all safety requirements, fire certificates, that is, clause 19 speaks of fire certificates to obtain fire clearances on premises. So, the aspect of response to fire has been fully dealt as well, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

With regard to the aspect of prevention, public awareness, mass sensitisation, and also the argument put forward by the Opposition that there would be no training, whether there is any provision for training, it is highlighted very clearly in clause 22 that training centres and training facilities will be provided to accommodate all procedures for training in relation to fire prevention and fire response. So, all those aspects which are crucial to fire rescue has been canvassed in this Bill, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Further, community education has also been put in the Bill; like I said, sensitisation and awareness programmes. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, you would see that such legislation has taken a large step further concerning the element of training and public awareness compared to the previous Bill. You would see that this is quite extensively canvassed in this Bill, and all the fundamentals are there; the fundamentals of public awareness, sensitisation, which are, I think, imperative to this Bill. That is why we have volunteer fire brigades, which is a concrete example of public participation concerning safety, lifesaving and public safety. This is a concrete example of public participation in relation to awareness, sensitisation and public safety.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill has also basically responded to lots of eventualities, and the powers and duties of the service have also been extensively legislated. It has stipulated in clause 17(1), that –

“The Chief Fire Officer may require any owner of premises to take reasonable measures for the purpose of reducing the risk of a fire occurring on the premises or reducing potential danger to persons, animals, property or the environment in event of a fire occurring within the premises”.

So, it has again taken care of all aspects, namely persons, animals, property and environment; all the four pillars concerning fire rescue. My submission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that this Bill has enhanced coordination, it has harmonised working relationships, it has tackled emergency organisations, and also there is a major step in recognising and accepting that, in fact, when we have calamities, natural disasters, unexpected occurrences, we have to be prepared. We have to be prepared, and we can prepare ourselves in a structured manner. We can prepare ourselves in a systemic manner, so that we can face any natural calamities. The only constant is change, and I am talking about climatic change. We have to be ready for any sort of climatic change. The only way to do that is through structured planning, and this Bill caters for that.

I again congratulate the Minister of Local Government who came with this Bill, and I fully agree to the explanation given by my colleague. With these words, I commend the Bill to the House.

(6.35 p.m.)

Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue):

M. le président, mon intervention ce soir sur ce projet de loi aurait dû être une intervention tranquille et sans polémique, car si nous avons des divergences sur la forme de ce projet de loi, dans le fond, nous sommes d'accord. Il faut reconnaître que nous jetons les bases ce soir pour un service moderne et performant.

Malheureusement, M. le président, l'intervention du ministre Mohamed me force à dévier de mon intervention initiale, car dans ses propos, il faut le dire, il a porté atteinte à la crédibilité et aussi à l'honneur de mon collègue, le député Nagalingum. Et je vais démontrer, dans mon intervention, que, dans le fond, l'honorable Nagalingum a raison dans ses propos. Par exemple, je prends le premier cas où le ministre Mohamed vient dire à la Chambre qu'entre 2000 et 2005 *'no fire station has been constructed during that period'*. This is not true, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Let me remind the House that the Triolet Fire Station was constructed during that period. A very modern fire station found at Triolet, in the constituency of the actual Prime Minister. And you know what, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? We did not inaugurate that fire station because Government at that time had decided that, prior to the 2005 elections, we would not proceed with inaugural ceremonies. That is why we did not go ahead with the inaugural of that fire station. Do you know what happened? Elections were held on 03 July 2005. Do you know when that fire station was inaugurated? On 11 July 2005; six days after results were proclaimed in 2005. That is why, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to set the record straight in this House.

Je vais, au cours de mon discours, réfuter les arguments mis de l'avant par les membres du gouvernement. Like I have said earlier, we are repealing the Fire Services Act, which goes back as far as 1953, that is, 60 years ago, and we are replacing it by the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill. As per the Explanatory Memorandum of the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill, we see that the primary objective is to make better provision for the

prevention of and response to fires, but also to enhance coordination and harmonise working relationships among emergency organisations.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when we have a look at this piece of legislation, we see that there is an important shift towards prevention of fires, and we take note also of the wider role of the Service, as stipulated in clause 5(2) of this piece of legislation, whereby it is stated, in the legislation, that now the Fire Services will deal with emergency situations. When one has a look at the definition of emergencies as at clause 2, one sees that emergency means a serious, unexpected and potentially dangerous occurrence such as fire, flood, storm, explosion, landslide, terrorist attack, accident, sea surge on land, leakage of harmful substances or oil spill which requires a significant and coordinated response.

When hon. Nagalingum referred to training, I think he was very right in saying what he said because we are now dealing with specific situations that require specific training. For example, when one has a look at the Police Force, you have a section called GIGN, which is specially trained to face certain situations. I think that the Fire Services will have to undergo such training because when one has a look at the reply made by the hon. Minister some time back with regard to training at the Fire Services, he said that the normal training relates to recruit training course, refresher course, physical fitness training, first-aid course, Station Officers course, incident common course. One would ask himself whether such training would enable those firefighters to be able to face such situation in cases of terrorist attack. I think that is what hon. Nagalingum meant when he referred to training. Not only in-house training, it has to be overseas training also, where you can get that expertise.

When the hon. Minister replied again to a question put to him by hon. Nagalingum - and for that matter we should note that hon. Nagalingum does his homework. He has put 27 questions to the hon. Minister based on Fire Services, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - he stated that no officer benefitted from overseas scholarship and overseas courses during the past two years, and that reply dates 21 May 2013.

We are very much concerned, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. When we are talking of a modern and competent service, we should ensure that those officers get the required and adequate training, whether it is in-house training in Mauritius or outside, to be able to face such situations defined in this piece of legislation as emergency situations. That is the point hon. Nagalingum wanted to make. We find it cheap ; *c'est de la malhonnêteté intellectuelle de la part d'un ministre, notamment le ministre Mohamed, de venir faire des commentaires à*

l'égard de l'honorable député Nagalingum concernant la formation au niveau de ce service, M. le président.

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill represents a comprehensive reform to the statutory framework that we have. As I stated earlier, in this piece of legislation, emphasis is laid on the prevention aspect of fires, that is, prevention is placed at the heart of this piece of legislation, and the wide role to be placed by the Service in a modern society. What we are talking about is our society. *J'ai écouté les intervenants du gouvernement.* When we come forward and say that consultations should have taken place, we do not mean only consultations with the Service. And even that, we have been told that proper consultations have not been held. What we are talking about is consultations with all the stakeholders, including the civil society. Why am I saying the civil society? Let me remind that hon. Minister that when his parents got problems during the flooding, it was the civil society that came to their rescue. That's why we said that consultations should have been wide enough to include even the civil society, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, although the Service requires more statutory power to achieve the goals that have been set in this piece of legislation, the Service should remain flexible in order to react promptly to certain immediate situations.

It is important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to note that fire incidents occupy only about 5% to 10% of the total activity of a fire brigade, and even in the future this percentage will not change drastically. That is why the Fire Service of tomorrow should have these specific responsibilities, as I have mentioned, in this piece of legislation.

These functions that we are asking Fire Officers to do now require a wider range of skills and competences. Fire services have always dealt with a wide range of tasks, but these tasks have not been recognised by the community at large. Lately, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have seen that these activities have taken a higher proportion. Firefighters now have to apply their skills and expertise in different ways. It is for this reason that the wider role that we want firefighters to do can only be achieved through a well-planned programme.

With these specific responsibilities in the future, those Fire Fighters will be part in the front line response, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in case of natural disasters, flooding, even

unnatural disasters which I have mentioned earlier, for example, act of terrorism. It is for this reason that this piece of Legislation that we are debating today should be clear and precise.

I, for one, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, believe that we should have had in this piece of Legislation an integrated risk management plan. We should have made that mandatory, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for the new Fire and Rescue Service to have an integrated risk management plan. In other words, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this would have placed on the shoulders of the Fire and Rescue Service the responsibility to prepare such an integrated plan.

Another aspect of this piece of Legislation - I think that was mentioned by hon. Nagalingum during his intervention - is related to the powers of the Minister. We don't go along at all with that philosophy.

M. le président depuis quelque temps dans cette Chambre, quand nous débattons des projets de lois, nous faisons ressortir l'accapement des ministres de ce gouvernement des institutions qui tombent sous leurs responsabilités. Quand on a débattu sur le projet de loi concernant les collectivités locales, nous avons fait la même remarque, les pouvoirs, - sans précédent - la mainmise de l'honorable ministre aujourd'hui sur le *Fire and Rescue Service*.

When you go to that piece of Legislation with regard to the powers of the Minister, although I should say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we agree that it is the role of the Minister to come forward with the policy of the service, but what we do not agree, is that it is for the Minister to decide on other issues. What is the competence of the hon. Minister with regard to fire and rescue service?

What is the competence of, maybe, his Permanent Secretary with regard to these, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? In other countries what happens is that there is the existence of an Advisory Board comprising of people having the required experience and competence in those fields which are very complex today, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. It is for that Advisory Board to advise the hon. Minister on policy concerning that service. It should have been this way in this piece of Legislation and not as it is, 'the hon. Minister shall be responsible for defining the broad policy to be followed by the service; the Minister shall discharge his functions' - and everything; that too, with very few consultations.

I would like the hon. Minister to reply again with regard to his powers at clause 8(2), where it is stated in the legislation -

“Without prejudice to subsection (1), the Minister may require the Service to respond to a particular type of emergency.’

This is not specifically referred to in this Act. What type of emergency are we talking about? Maybe, when the hon. Minister concludes, he should let us know what are those types of emergencies or that type of emergency which is being referred to at Clause 8(2), Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

We require a service which has to be well prepared to face these new challenges; not only prepared in terms of training, but also having the required infrastructure to be able to deliver.

I will raise an issue which I consider as very, very important concerning the Ministry of Local Government and I believe that the hon. Minister will agree with me, because in his reply he even acknowledges this fact. It is with regard to the Port Louis Fire Station.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister himself, in a reply to a question put to him, again by my friend, hon. Deven Nagalingum, states –

“I am aware that the building housing the Fire Station of Port Louis is in a derelict state due to its old age.”

And that is not all, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. In another reply almost one year later, because that question was put in 2011 and the other question put in 2012 – again, *chapeau à l’honorable Deven Nagalingum qui vient poser la question à l’honorable ministre*. Let us see what the hon. Minister said in his reply –

“I am informed by the Fire Services Department that on 22 November 2006, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping submitted a structural investigation report on the Port Louis Fire Station which states that the building suffers from visible structural defects, in particular the first floor and roof.”

This is where we are housing our fire fighters!

Secondly, a survey was conducted on 18 July 2007 by the Energy Services Division of the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities with a view to assessing the overall condition of the electrical installations in the building. The Energy Services Division had highlighted that the electrical installation in the building was in a very poor state and represented a serious hazard for its occupants. It had recommended that a complete electrical re-wiring be carried out. I don't know whether this has been done or not; maybe the hon. Minister will let us know. I don't know whether this has been done or not; maybe, the hon. Minister will let us know.

And lastly, the Occupational Safety and Health Unit has, in its last report, two years later, in January 2012, requested Management to take necessary action to urgently relocate the Fire Station. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are in 2013 and the hon. Minister is still stating to this House that consideration is being *given to the relocation of that Fire Station. And the last reply dates back to 09 April 2013. If we want a modern service, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to react to such situations. We cannot ask those officers to perform when they have to work in a building which is in such a situation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. So, I would urge Government to urgently look into this situation.*

The Minister has also spoken about volunteer fire brigades. I want to be clear about that also because we have under volunteer fire brigades what we also call retained fire brigades, and these are new concepts. It is stated in this legislation that those volunteer fire brigades will assist the service in the prevention and suppression of fires and the rest.

The term 'volunteer' as compared to 'retained' has a difference, whereby volunteers are not compensated; retained fire officers are compensated. They will have to leave their work to be able to come and get the necessary in-house training but also whenever they have to attend to emergencies and emergencies can happen at any time of the day or night, those people - some of them, not all - will have to leave the job to be able to help. Now, will they be compensated for the work they are doing and if so, what type of compensation, whether during the time they are undergoing training or whether during the time they are helping in an emergency situation. Now, how will that work? How will they be released from their duties? That is why I said earlier when we talk of consultation, it should have been broad consultation, because now we are asking under that item, that is volunteer fire brigades, members of the civil society to come and help the service. If they are not even consulted on this piece of legislation, how will their employers come forward to release them when they

will be required at the fire station, either to undergo training or to attend to an emergency, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? That is why we have a good piece of legislation; we are repealing an Act which goes back as far as 1953.

We agree that time has come to come not only with a modern piece of legislation, but with a modern service having a wider role. Not only firefighting, but also they have to attend to emergencies. But, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we should ensure that to implement that piece of legislation, we give them the appropriate tools and equipment for them to be able to shoulder those responsibilities, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Thank you.

(7.05 p.m.)

Mr Aimée: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Members from both sides of the House for their contributions to the debate on the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill. The Government Fire Service is dedicated to building a safer Mauritian society. Yet, there are always challenges, old and new, that need to be faced.

M. le président, depuis ma nomination comme ministre des collectivités locales et des îles en 2010, c'est la deuxième fois que je viens avec le projet de loi. Premièrement, c'était le *Local Government Bill*, là aussi j'ai écouté tout le monde et comme aujourd'hui quand on voit un des membres, en 15 minutes d'allocation, il y a 47 objections. Tant mieux! C'est la démocratie. Mais j'aime autant vous dire qu'est-ce qui n'a pas été dit dans le *Local Government Bill*, même quand on avait circulé un an en avance. Aujourd'hui, on voit le même scénario, le *Fire...*

(Interruptions)

Non, mais...

The Deputy Speaker: Please, address the Chair hon. Minister!

Mr Aimée: Aujourd'hui, c'est le même scénario pour le *Fire and Rescue Service Bill*.

(Interruptions)

Comme vous voyez le nombre de clause qu'il y a dans le *Fire and Rescue Service Bill*, il y a au moins dix plaintes, quelques fois là où on avait pris en considération comme, par

exemple, je vais commencer par l'honorable François, training and facilities. L'honorable Lesjongard en a parlé. Notre ami, l'honorable Nagalingum a dit ça. Clause 22 justement dit - the Bill highlights the importance of training to firefighters and provides for the establishment of training centre for the purpose. It has also placed an obligation on any person providing training in fire safety to be registered with the fire service and with the Mauritius Qualifications Authority.

On va plus loin, M. le président. Nos formateurs de la *Fire Department*, ce sont des personnes *trained* sous la loi d'IFE. On ne prend pas au petit bonheur, ce sont des gens qualifiés sous cette partie de la loi de l'IFE. Il faut qu'il soit gradué de l'IFE. A Maurice, qui sont ceux qui sont plus expérimentés *for the training* ? Ce sont eux. Qui sont ceux qui ont le *know-how* pour pouvoir donner de *training* que ce soit au *volunteer firefighter* ou *firefighter* tout court en général. Alors, il est dit dans la clause 22 c'est déjà prévu. Je ne vois pas pourquoi ils ont pris ça pour tourner : 'Ah, il n'y a pas de *training*, comment va être fait, le *training* ? Ça va être fait sous la supervision du *Chief Fire Officer* qui lui a été ...

(Interruptions)

Oui. Pour vous dire, M. le président, nous, on va plus loin. L'honorable Lesjongard a parlé de l'état décrépidité du *fire station* qui se trouve à l'arrière de la municipalité. C'est vrai ! Vous avez raison l'honorable membre d'attirer mon attention.

The Deputy Speaker: You must not look in the direction of the hon. Member there.

Mr Aimée: J'aime autant dire M. le président, que depuis mon arrivée, on a exploré toutes les possibilités. A un moment donné, il y avait des terrains qui étaient réservés à la colline Monneron mais quand on a fait des études de fiabilité, cela va couter tellement cher et cela ne donne aucune garantie avec le glissement de terrain dans cette région. A un autre moment donné, on a essayé d'avoir un terrain laissé par le ministère de l'infrastructure publique qui se trouve au rond point où se trouve l'ICAC mais là aussi le Road Safety Unit nous a dit que ce n'est pas possible parce qu'avec cette grande artère, ce sera difficile pour les *fire vehicles to move around*. Or, on a dû encore une fois retourner vers le ministère du logement et là, il y a trois semaines, le ministère du logement nous a alloué seize arpents de terrain tout près du Jin Fei.

(Interruptions)

Vous pouvez rigoler comme cela je sais qu'il y a des gens heureux autour de moi. Alors, à Port Louis, il n'y a pas d'endroit disponible où on peut mettre vraiment un fire-fighter digne de ce nom. On ne peut pas le mettre à Port Louis, il n'y a pas de place. Le seul endroit que nous avons maintenant se trouve près de Jin Fei - seize arpents de terrain mis à notre disposition. Là j'aime autant vous dire que dans le *Bill* on a parlé du *Fire Academy*. Il n'y aura pas seulement une station de pompiers mais aussi un *Fire Academy* et il y aura encore du terrain pour pouvoir développer tout ce qui vient après; toutes les décisions qu'on doit prendre après avoir utilisé une partie du terrain parce qu'on ne peut pas utiliser seize arpents à la fois. Merci à l'honorable docteur Kasenally.

(Interruptions)

Rigolez je suis content. Clause 6 - working agreement: why is the approval of the Minister required; CFO is professional? Shouldn't he be given flexibility to decide?

Permettez-moi de vous dire M. le président, je pose la question aux membres de l'autre côté de la Chambre. Comment voulez-vous qu'un ministre réponde au Parlement; réponde au media, réponde au public en général ; réponde aux contribuables...

(Interruptions)

Pourquoi pas? Je l'ai fait, je n'ai pas honte. M. le président, les questions qu'on entend au Parlement surtout. J'aime autant vous dire que même pour les uniformes des fire-fighters, les questions sont posées au Parlement. C'est quelque chose de day-to-day management responsable. L'état des bâtiments, les toilettes – on vient poser des questions au ministre: quand vous allez remédier les toilettes. Avec tout cela, je n'aurai pas le droit d'être le policy maker et d'avoir certaines responsabilités. Comment voulez vous qu'un ministre...

(Interruptions)

Je sais qu'il y a des gens heureux autour de moi mais moi je ne rigole pas, je fais mon travail et je ne suis pas sarcastique comme les autres, on peut le dire.

Power to Minister: il y a certaines clauses – il y a deux ou trois où je suis obligé de reprendre et qui sait peut-être en 2015, 2020, 2025; ils vont être au pouvoir ils vont se servir de cette loi.

M. le président, l'honorable Nagalingum et l'honorable François ont parlé de l'emergency rescue. Dans des cas d'exception, ils ont parlé de l'aéroport, ils ont parlé du port et même je crois entendre d'un tremblement de terre ou cela peut être un tsunami. M. le

président, le port est équipé; le port a des bateaux et des canots qui sont différents. Ce ne sont pas des équipements de pompiers; cela n'a rien à voir. A l'aéroport, ils sont équipés, ils ont leur fire-fighting equipment et Dieu sait des fire-fighting equipment modernes. Nous, nous sommes là à coopérer; nous sommes là en cas d'urgence pour les aider. Cela n'a rien à voir avec le training d'aller apprendre à nager ou bien d'avoir des équipements pour le port. Le port a des bateaux pour; le coast guard a des bateaux pour. Nous allons les renforcer en cas d'urgence pour pouvoir donner un coup de main. Dans des cas d'exception, cela n'a rien à voir ce que vous avez mentionné l'honorable Nagalingum et l'honorable François.

Alors nous avons des arrangements et la loi prend en compte tous ces arrangements avec tous ces stakeholders avec qui on peut à l'avenir travailler pour connaître des résultats positifs, des résultats concrets en ce qui concerne nos valeureux fire-fighters.

M. le président, ils ont parlé du syndicat mais je regrette si vous avez des informations qui ne sont pas conformes par rapport au projet de loi que j'amène au Parlement aujourd'hui. Déjà j'aime autant vous dire que le projet de loi a été circulé il y a trois semaines mais depuis que je suis arrivé à ce ministère, il y a eu quatre fois où j'ai rencontré les gens de l'union en particulier je peux même citer le nom de monsieur Bacsoo qui est le représentant de l'union. Quand il y a des questions qui arrivent au Parlement, je sais d'où elles viennent. J'ai quand même mes petites sources. Alors ils ont proposé un amendement nécessaire to be consistent with the provision concernant l'union.

The existing paragraph 8(1) (c) (ii) has been left broad enough to capture the possibility of consultation with the recognised trade unions and also any other person whom the Minister considers to represent employees of the Service. *Je suis prêt à collaborer.*

L'honorable François avait parlé de *Fire Department* à Rodrigues. Bien sûr, la loi qu'on a ici peut être serviable aussi à Rodrigues. Il n'y a pas de problème. D'ailleurs, j'ai offert tout le temps ma coopération à l'Assemblée de Rodrigues. Je ne vais pas énumérer tout cela, mais je l'ai fait. Maintenant, il ne faut pas oublier que le *RRA* est autonome. Vous avez votre propre administration, votre propre *management*, vous pouvez vous servir de cette loi pour tout autre aspect. Moi, comme ministre représentant le *Local Government* et le *Fire Department*, je ne peux pas intervenir. Cela va être la même chose comme le *Local Government* qu'on a eu pas mal de frasques.

La clause 5 parle de *Duties and Powers of Service*. Je viens d'énumérer tout ce qui concerne le port, l'aéroport et d'autres calamités qui pourraient surgir.

Clause 22 deals with training facilities. This demonstrates the will of Government to ensure that the officers of the Fire Service are adequately trained and motivated to perform their duties in accordance with the new Act.

Clause 5(3) of the Bill - the Fire Service shall not alone execute schemes for disasters. *Nous avons un Disaster Committee. C'est ce comité qui décide qui doit être on board pour le disaster.*

My Ministry and the Fire Service will welcome all exchanges with the Fire Department of Rodrigues. With regard to the application of the Act to Rodrigues, the administrative purpose should be on the site of the RRA.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Fire Service being a discipline falls along the same line as the Police. It is autonomous in its functions. However, it is to be reckoned that the Minister to whom the responsibility of Fire Service is assigned is accountable to the public and to the National Assembly. He is often called upon to reply to questions put to him at the National Assembly and to argue for the Budget allocation. It is, therefore, very much reasonable that a section providing for some policy powers be given to him in the Bill.

M. le président, ce projet de loi répond à un besoin de corriger les décalages actuels entre, d'une part des provisions légales et d'autre part les responsabilités et activités journalières de nos sapeurs-pompiers. En effet, la loi de 1954 ne reflète plus cette diversité des missions et d'interventions. A l'origine, le service des sapeurs-pompiers a été créé pour combattre les incendies, mais les années passant, ce service a connu une telle mutation. Il s'est élargi pour inclure de nouveaux domaines d'intervention. Par conséquent, les sapeurs-pompiers sont aujourd'hui confrontés à de nouveaux risques engendrés par l'évolution de la technologie qui était inconnue lors de la rédaction de la loi de 1954. Leur organisation, leur compétence et les équipements ont dû être adaptés à leur nouvelle mission. Mais la loi vieille d'un demi-siècle est caduque. Porter secours aux personnes dans diverses situations de détresse, accidents de la route, inondations, effondrements constituent de nos jours une des missions les plus importantes de ce service. Ces interventions devenues courantes pour nos sapeurs-pompiers ne sont pas couvertes par la loi de 1954. Ne faudrait-il pas, dès lors, offrir un cadre légal à de telles interventions et reconnaître de telles activités? Outre les incendies des bâtiments résidentiels et commerciaux, les sapeurs-pompiers sont aussi appelés à combattre les incendies industriels. Moins connue l'activité des préventions des sapeurs-pompiers, en effet, ils mènent également des missions, des préventions sur le terrain. Ils ont

pour objectif de développer, en collaboration avec des civils, des chefs d'entreprises, des techniciens d'usine et autres – ce que l'honorable Lesjongard m'avait demandé – une action commune de prévention des sinistres.

Pour la première fois en 2011, cinq femmes se sont engagées dans ce service. Il s'agit d'une suite logique au *New Local Government Act*. Au sein des collectivités locales, tout comme chez les sapeurs-pompiers, les femmes mauriciennes ont leur place. Par ailleurs, il me tient à cœur d'instaurer les statuts des pompiers volontaires basés sur le système ayant cours dans d'autres pays. Cette initiative aura pour principal intérêt de responsabiliser les citoyens et de protéger les principes des sauvetages et des premières aides de notre société.

M. le président, l'intérêt que porte ce gouvernement aux services des pompiers est indéniable. On a qu'à juger les investissements dans ce secteur. Ces deux dernières années R 250 millions ont été investies dans les équipements. Sur le plan des infrastructures, la couverture territoriale de ce service se poursuivra. En plus, neuf casernes existantes, la toute première caserne de l'ouest à Tamarin sera bientôt inaugurée, trois autres localisées, comme je viens de mentionner cet après-midi à Montagne Blanche, Goodlands et Rose Belle. Nos sapeurs-pompiers savent déployer dans leurs interventions, dans leurs actions de prévention de grands moyens techniques et savent coordonner avec efficacité les situations les plus périlleuses.

Permettez-moi de souligner l'engagement personnel, physique et moral de chacun de ces soldats de feu et de leur dire combien ils sont appréciés par tous ceux qu'ils secourent.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from time to time, surveys are held among the general public to find out the popularity of these working in the different sectors of society, such as politicians, journalists, civil servants, policemen, etc., etc. It is a fact that firefighters consistently come out near the top of those who have the trust of most Mauritians. They fully deserve this recognition.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank all those involved in the preparation of this piece of legislation, in particular, the officers of my Ministry, the Government Fire Service and the State Law Office which have spent two years fine-tuning all aspects of the Bill.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(The Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

The Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill (No. X of 2013) was considered and agreed to.

On the Assembly resuming with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair, the Deputy Speaker reported accordingly.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service Bill (No. X of 2013) was read the third time and passed.