

Address by the President-Year 2000

Address by the President at the Opening of the First Session of the Third National Assembly of the Republic of Mauritius on Tuesday, 3rd October, 2000

Mr. Speaker,

Honourable Members,

1. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the formal opening of the First Session of the Third National Assembly. I wish to bid a special welcome to the newly elected members of Parliament of this new millennium.
2. Government is conscious of the fact that Mauritius is currently confronted with extremely serious economic and social problems which, if left unattended, would compromise the fruits of preceding decades of development and put in jeopardy the future of the younger generation.
3. Government will take all necessary measures to promote national unity and solidarity, reinforce democracy, ensure good governance and transparency in public affairs, improve the law and order situation, restore public and business confidence, and protect the more vulnerable groups of society.
4. The Mauritian economy is going through a difficult period. There are severe imbalances in public finances, the public debt is at an unprecedented level and the budget deficit is unsustainable with expenditure far exceeding revenue. Government is concerned about the adverse consequences of this serious economic deterioration which can lead to growing unemployment and will take all necessary measures to restore balance in public finances, reduce the debt burden and the budget deficit. A Fiscal Responsibility Act will be introduced to promote an effective and transparent management of public finances.
5. Government will pursue a monetary policy aimed at containing inflation while contributing to export competitiveness, higher savings and investment, and improved growth.
6. Restoring the economy on the path of sustained growth will be the top priority of Government. An objective review of the present state of the economy, including public finances, will be undertaken to provide a sound base for future Government action and for policy reforms in the immediate and medium terms.
7. Unemployment has become a major economic and social problem. Active measures will be pursued to reverse the unemployment trend and to create an environment conducive to the generation of productive jobs.
8. The continued existence of pockets of poverty is a cause for grave concern. Poverty alleviation will be one of the priorities of Government.

Honourable Members

9. The unprecedented globalisation of politics and the economy entails numerous challenges for small developing countries.

10. The foreign policy of Mauritius will aim at developing and implementing a proactive, adaptable and efficient economic diplomacy in order to sustain economic development, with increasing emphasis on securing and enhancing market access and tapping business opportunities worldwide.

11. Mauritius will continue to assert its sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia and Tromelin, and press for their early and unconditional return.

12. In international fora Mauritius will contribute towards the creation of a stable, peaceful and equitable international order characterised, inter-alia, by respect for the independence and sovereignty of states and the promotion of democratic values and human rights.

13. Another cornerstone of our foreign policy will be to strengthen the process of regional integration through our participation in mechanisms set up by SADC and COMESA, IOC and IOR-ARC.

14. Our economic, cultural and trade relations with Africa will be consolidated through our active participation in the OAU and sub-regional groupings and at bilateral level.

15. Steps will be taken to enhance our economic and political links with the European Union and the United States of America in the context of the Cotonou Agreement and the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act.

16. Mauritius will contribute positively towards the resolution of disarmament issues, in order to create a world free from nuclear threats.

Honourable Members

17. Government is fully conscious of the fact that maintenance of law and order is of the utmost importance for the peace and security of the citizens and for the social and economic development of Mauritius.

18. Government will spare no effort to provide all necessary resources - physical, financial and human - to the Police Force to enable it to maintain law and order at all times in the country including Rodrigues and the Outer Islands. To this end, measures will be taken to also restore public confidence in the Police Force.

19. Government will place considerable emphasis on the improvement of the quality of the policing services of the Police Force through an accelerated process of change. Full account will be taken of the motivational needs of Police Officers at all levels to ensure that they attain the professional standards expected of them.

20. The National Intelligence Unit (NIU) will be dissolved and the present system of surveillance of political activities by the police will be stopped. A highly professional intelligence service will be created to uphold State security.

21. Government will introduce a system of "Juges D'instruction" based on the French model in each police district with a view to assisting the police to instruct cases, especially the more serious ones.

22. Government will provide for dissuasive penalties as punishment for crimes, such as assaults against women, children and tourists as well as hold-ups and burglaries.

23. Government will introduce legislation in order to provide for supplementary powers to District Magistrates to deal with cases where a person has died in prison or whilst in police custody, and to deal with other serious cases at the request of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Magistrates will be empowered to handle such cases right from the outset to ensure the independence and impartiality of the enquiry.

24. Government will take appropriate steps for the humane treatment of suspects in detention, especially in police cells.

25. A Police Complaints Board will be established and chaired by an independent person with legal background to inquire into complaints against the Police.

Honourable Members

26. Government will make every effort to improve and modernise the administration of justice in order to respond to the needs of the people and the expectations of a modern business and financial community. In that respect, necessary judicial and legal reforms will be carried out following appropriate consultations with the Judiciary, the Bar Council, the Law Society, the Chamber of Notaries and organisations representing civil society.

27. Such reforms will make access to justice easier for the people of Mauritius and provide a prompt and fair treatment of cases, by reducing delays and through a gradual process of decentralisation. The system of legal aid will also be reviewed.

28. Government will take measures in order to provide better facilities to the Law Reform Commission to enable it to more effectively assist in the development and modernisation of the laws of Mauritius.

29. Government will give due consideration to the issue of Muslim Personal Law in the light of the recent report of the Muslim Personal Law Committee in order to reach a satisfactory solution in consultation with all interested parties.

Honourable Members

30. Government is alive to the fact that the prevalence of fraud and corruption which is both a social scourge and a hindrance to economic development is undermining our society. Government

will wage a relentless battle against corrupt and fraudulent practices. It will adopt an open policy to enable non-governmental organisations, the press and civil society at large to play an active role.

31. The provisions of the Declaration of Assets Act 1991, will be extended to cover municipal and district councillors and senior public officers as well as senior local government officials. A Parliamentary Select Committee will be set up to introduce a Code of Ethics for members of the National Assembly. To ensure that the provisions of the Declaration of Assets Act as well as those of the Code of Ethics are complied with, a Parliamentary Supervisory Committee with members from both sides of the House will be set up.

32. A public officer will be designated in each Ministry to ensure that the management of public finances is done on a sound and rigorous basis. That officer will be accountable to the Director of Audit.

33. An Independent Commission Against Corruption and Economic Crime, the ICACEC, with wide powers to fight fraud and corruption, will be set up to replace the Economic Crime Office. An anti-corruption squad will be established to support the ICACEC in its task.

34. The law will be amended to provide for more severe custodial penalties for economic crimes and the seizure of ill-gotten assets.

35. Government is conscious of the tremendous damage caused to society by the drug problem. It will wage a ceaseless battle against drug trafficking. A comprehensive campaign of prevention targeting the vulnerable social groups will be carried out in cooperation with non-governmental organisations. The law will be consolidated to provide for more severe punishment for drug traffickers and dealers. Provision will also be made for more effective cooperation with international agencies.

36. Government will set up a Narcotics Bureau to monitor and support all organisations engaged in the fight against drugs. More centres will be set up for the treatment, education and rehabilitation of drug addicts.

37. The Police, Customs and Immigration Services will be provided with modern and sophisticated technological facilities to prevent and detect the introduction of drugs into Mauritius.

38. The Forensic Science Laboratory will be better equipped to assist in the fight against drug trafficking and consumption.

Honourable Members

39. Provision will be made in the budget for the financing of political parties by the State under the responsibility of the Electoral Supervisory Commission.

40. Government is aware of the importance of free and fair elections to guarantee the democratic fundamentals of our society. Government is anxious to ensure that the organisation of elections in Mauritius holds out guarantees of fairness and equity. To that end, the Electoral Supervisory

Commission will be strengthened and its responsibilities extended. A review of all practical aspects relating to the holding of elections will be undertaken to promote greater transparency and secure a level playing field for competing parties.

41. Government will introduce a Public Funding of Political Parties Bill with a view to promoting sound, dynamic and lively democracy and eliminating the risks of corruption and influence peddling.

42. In the light of the constitutional experience of the Republic of India since its Independence, Government will propose amendments to the Constitution of Mauritius so as to consolidate and strengthen our democratic system. Additional powers will be given to the President of the Republic, including the dissolution of Parliament.

43. Government will maintain the existing electoral system. It will further provide for the nomination of additional members on a proportional system to ensure a more equitable representation in Parliament.

44. The modalities of the electoral reforms will be entrusted to a Commission of Constitutional Experts and its recommendations studied by a Select Committee of the National Assembly before the introduction of appropriate legislation.

Honourable Members

45. It is the objective of the Government to ensure a rapid liberalisation of airwaves. The Independent Broadcasting Authority will be set up. It will be called upon to adopt user- friendly procedures for the issue of licences to private operators for the provision of broadcasting services. All operators will have to abide by a code of conduct for broadcasting services.

46. The Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation will operate as an independent public TV station in accordance with the MBC Act. The third TV channel of the MBC will be privatised. Norms will be set up for advertisement on the private and public channels.

47. A special Fund financed and managed by the State and private operators will be set up to promote the creation, both locally and regionally, of radio and t.v. programmes.

48. Government is determined to ensure that the fundamental democratic principles of equality of rights, equality of opportunities and equality of treatment for all Mauritians are upheld in all spheres of social and economic activities in our country. An Equal Opportunities Commission will be instituted to ensure respect for these principles having regard in particular to employment practices both in the public and private sectors.

49. The exploration, exploitation and protection of our oceanographic resources for the economic and environmental benefits of the population will receive systematic attention.

50. Government will give priority to the collection of all scientific and technical data to enable Mauritius to submit its claim for an extended Continental Shelf, beyond its 200 miles Exclusive

Economic Zone, in accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

51. Government will take preventive measures to protect Mauritian territory, both land and sea, from adverse effects of climate change.

52. Government will give particular attention to Port development. The overall objective is to make of Port Louis a regional hub so as to increase significantly transshipment cargo. Government will endeavour to make the port a gateway to Africa and a regional centre for shipping activities.

53. Airport infrastructure will be further upgraded in response to the increasing flow of passengers and air freight. Safety of flight operations will be given top priority. Air space under the responsibility of Mauritius will be reorganised to further improve the provision of air traffic services in line with the concept of the satellite-based future air navigation system as prescribed by the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

54. All efforts will be made to boost the welfare of the inhabitants of Agalega through better facilities for education and health. Better accommodation will be provided to the needy inhabitants.

55. Government will, as a matter of urgency, prepare a blue print on the future development of St. Brandon and its surroundings so as to better harmonise the national security requirements, environmental protection measures, fisheries management imperatives as well as economic development and tourism ventures.

Honourable Members

56. Changes in the global environment require the civil service to be result-oriented and pro-active, ready to provide quality services to the public. Government is fully conscious that the public service has a crucial role to play in the economic and social development of Mauritius. An audit of the training needs of the public sector will be carried out. Government will ensure that public officers are given all facilities including training to perform their work in an environment conducive to enhanced productivity.

57. Appropriate measures will be taken to ensure more transparency in the recruitment and promotion of staff. Appropriate legal provisions for appeal against decisions of the Public Service Commission will be put in place.

58. Mobility between the public and private sectors will be encouraged so as to create the right synergy between managerial staff of the two sectors.

59. Government is concerned with the increasing rate of unemployment among school-leavers as well as redundant factory employees.

60. Government's priority will be to create the right macro- economic and social environment to stimulate investment growth and employment creation. In this context, a key area of Government's attention will be education and skills development. This strategy of employment creation will be based on a consolidation of existing sectors, namely industry and tourism, the development of

information technology, telecommunications and financial services and a special support to small and medium enterprises.

61. Government will encourage the modernisation and the consolidation of the Sugar Industry to enable it to adapt to a rapidly evolving and highly competitive global environment.

62. On the international scene, Government will step up efforts at all levels to safeguard the country's interests under the Preferential Trade Accords with the European Union and the United States of America.

63. Government will also participate actively at the World Trade Organisation in the negotiations on agriculture to uphold the concept of the multi-functional role of agriculture in Small Island Developing States.

64. The project for the phasing out of Sugar Estate Camps will be completed by 2001. Irrigation facilities will be extended to cater for a larger acreage of land belonging to the planting community.

65. Government will actively encourage diversification of our agriculture and endeavour to attain self sufficiency in food crops. In this context, additional incentives will be extended to growers.

66. The use of biotechnology for the production of disease-free and high yielding planting varieties will be encouraged.

67. The Technology Introduction and Development Scheme will be reshaped to cater for a larger number of entrepreneurs willing to adopt new technologies.

68. Government will set up a Small Planters' Welfare Fund to alleviate the difficulties resulting from natural calamities.

Honourable Members

69. Government believes that a substantial increase in the level of investment in the industrial sector is critical for the economic transformation and social advancement of a country.

70. Government will come forward with an integrated and global industrial strategy to take advantage of the opportunities arising from the regional and international environment. The focus will be on the development of competitive advantage, based on technology-driven industrialisation and high value-added production.

71. Government will endeavour to ensure the long term viability of the textile and garment sector which constitutes the backbone of the EPZ. In this context, the opportunities offered by the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act will be fully utilized and a strategy of closer regional cooperation adopted.

72. A major thrust of Government policy will be the diversification of the industrial base and promotion of investment in emerging sectors such as informatics, electronics, light engineering, printing and publishing, jewellery and pharmaceuticals.

73. Government will review the role and function of institutions engaged in the promotion of exports and investments. The role of MEDIA in the context of the creation of the Board of Investment will be reviewed.

74. Government will play a key role to promote the development of small and medium enterprises and encourage development of sub-contracting partnerships and exchanges. A special integrated package of assistance will be developed to provide for the modernisation of SMEs and enhance their export capacity, especially in the context of the coming into force of the SADC Trade Protocol.

75. Government will establish a new regulatory framework to promote competition so as to ensure a better trading environment and more protection to consumers. In this context, a Competition Bill will be introduced in Parliament and the following institutions will be created:-

- an Office of Fair Trading;
- a Competition Tribunal; and
- a Competition and Consumers Consultative Council.

76. Government will also place more emphasis on consumer education and welfare.

Honourable Members

77. In the spirit of regional integration, Government will see to it that Mauritius derives maximum benefit from the implementation of the SADC Trade Protocol and COMESA Free Trade Area. Mauritius will also focus on the regional dimension of trade-in services at SADC and COMESA level.

78. In view of the crucial importance of trade liberalisation to the Mauritian economy, Government will ensure that Mauritius remains a pro-active player in the World Trade Organisation and participates fully in its deliberations with a view to protecting our vital interests.

79. Regional co-operation will continue to be an important element of national policy to achieve greater economic integration and to capitalise on the emerging opportunities within an integrated network of regional and sub-regional groups.

80. Government will give priority to the sound and sustained development of the financial services sector to enable it to become a major source of income and employment. To establish Mauritius as a financial hub of high repute and excellence, an integrated approach to financial regulation will be made to ensure closer and more effective supervision and a sustained development of the activities of the various financial markets, both onshore and offshore.

81. A Financial Services Authority will be set up to provide integrated financial supervision and to formulate policies and priorities for the development of the financial services sector to enhance its international competitiveness, maintain high standards, and consolidate links with international financial agencies.

82. Legislation will be introduced to reinforce the regulation governing the financial services and the supervision of service providers to protect consumers. Greater competition will be encouraged in financial markets to reduce the cost of financial intermediation to the economy and promote an efficient allocation of capital for growth.

83. Savings and investment will be encouraged by putting in place a modern and well-regulated capital market infrastructure, and by the introduction of new financial institutions.

84. Government is convinced that Tourism will be a major creator of employment and foreign exchange earner. In this context, hotel room capacity will be increased to meet the growing demand.

85. Government will ensure that the protection of the social and natural environment and the promotion of leisure facilities for Mauritians are fully integrated in the development of the tourism sector.

86. A National Tourism Development Plan spelling out an optimal development scenario for this sector will be published.

87. Furthermore, emphasis will be laid on the linkages with other sectors of the economy, with a view to increasing tourist spending and employment creation.

88. The development of eco-tourism which promotes environment protection and broadens the tourism attraction of the country will be undertaken. Strict security measures will be taken to protect visitors.

Honourable Members

89. Government is fully conscious of the importance of the "new economy" of information and communication technology and the opportunities which it affords to countries like ours. Government will develop the Information Technology and Communications industry to increase national wealth, create new opportunities and jobs.

90. Extensive deployment of information and communications technology will promote and democratise access to information. An intelligent village will be set up as a digital free zone to accelerate the development of the IT industry. The necessary incentive schemes and improved facilities will be provided to attract foreign investment.

91. The use of IT in education is central to supporting the development of an efficient workforce for sustaining economic growth. Computer-aided learning facilities will be put in place right from the pre-primary level. Partnerships and alliances will be devised with local and international technology leaders to attract high calibre IT professionals to support and drive the net economy.

92. The existing legal framework will be reviewed and consolidated to provide for the emergence of a knowledge society, and to create the right environment to boost the growth of the IT industry.

93. In addition, an IT Promotion Agency will be set up in order to market and promote Mauritius as a centre of excellence for information technology and telecommunications.

94. Government will lead the way by bringing its services closer to businesses and the people by implementing the concept of one-stop non-stop delivery channel. It will further leverage on existing infrastructure by setting up information kiosks in public areas including a modernised postal service to offer customised and value-added e-services.

Honourable Members

95. Government is conscious of the need to protect our fragile ecosystem for the benefit of present and future generations.

96. In order to meet the environmental challenges of the 21st century, for the attainment of our environmental policy goals, Government will introduce a new Environment Protection Bill. A rational land use policy will be established to ensure successful environmental land management while respecting and protecting the environmentally sensitive areas.

97. A National Cleaner Production Centre will be set up to encourage access to green technology. Fiscal incentives will also be provided to encourage environmentally friendly initiatives.

98. The protection of coastal zone, which is a vital resource for tourism, will be high on the agenda of the Government. The Integrated Coastal Zone Management concept will be improved and put into practice.

99. A well-structured "Police de l'Environnement" will be set up to ensure compliance with environmental laws. Legislation will be revamped to ensure the effectiveness of enforcement.

100. A national environmental sensitization campaign will be launched with the participation of all stakeholders in order to inculcate among the public an environment friendly attitude.

Honourable Members

101. Government is alive to the increasing demand for housing units and to the poor living environment on certain housing estates. Government will vigorously pursue new housing programmes for low income earners and rehabilitate existing housing estates through the provision of appropriate social and infrastructural facilities.

102. The Building Act 1919 will be completely reviewed and will provide for less cumbersome procedures for the issue of building permits. New Regulations will be made for the registration of building contractors and consultants.

103. In an endeavour to increase the number of houses and encourage home ownership, Government will support individuals through grants and sponsored loans, develop housing sites with appropriate services for allocation to low income earners, solicit a more active involvement of the private sector for the release of land and review incentive schemes to increase private sector investments in housing projects.

104. The Fair Rent Tribunal will be made operational.

105. Government will introduce a National Land Information Bill to facilitate rational land management.

106. Government will take urgent steps to tackle the chaotic situation prevailing in the public transport system. A transport planning exercise will be undertaken. A decision will be taken on an alternative mode of transport linking Curepipe to Port Louis. The road network will be improved to provide better links between regions undergoing rapid development and to better access to remote areas.

107. The problem of smoke-emitting vehicles will be tackled vigorously. The parking problem in Port Louis will be addressed through the creation of new parking areas and bus terminals built at the periphery of Port Louis and the provision of shuttles to the city centre.

108. Government is conscious of the growing energy needs of a modern and vibrant economy. Reforms in the power sector will be undertaken. A National Plan for the Energy Sector will be prepared.

109. Reforms will be undertaken at the Central Electricity Board and a Strategic Partner appointed to ensure financial viability, technology transfer and the development of new sources of renewable energy. The Power Sector Reform will result in the creation of a regulatory body to supervise the operations of new and independent power producers.

110. Government will review the overall policy of the development of the water sector and the status and the role of the Central Water Authority. The main objective will be the provision of good quality drinking-water on a 24 hour basis, an enhanced leak detection campaign, acquisition of appropriate technology and the creation of a regulatory body.

111. Government will accelerate the implementation of the Sewerage Master Plan with a view to an increased coverage of the network and its extension to the peripheral areas of Port Louis, Plaines Wilhems, Flic-en-Flac, Mahebourg, Goodlands and Flacq.

Honourable Members

112. Government is aware of the threats posed to social peace and to the cohesion of our society in recent years and is determined to further consolidate national unity and promote social integration. A global strategy will be devised fsto ensure the long-term sustainability of the Welfare State. Priority will be given to the provision of high quality social services relevant to the changing needs of society. An Action Plan will be prepared to address the pressing problems of

social deprivation and poverty. Adequate human and financial resources will be made available for the fight against poverty and the rehabilitation of deprived areas.

113. The rights to education, health care and housing which are fundamental democratic rights will be upheld as they constitute a sine qua non condition for sustainable economic development.

114. Specific measures will be adopted to address the needs of women, the elder members of society, children, the handicapped and the vulnerable social groups.

115. With the trend towards an ageing population, the need to ensure the future viability of the National Pensions Fund will be fully addressed.

116. Government is aware that fundamental reforms of our health sector are long overdue. It has become imperative to develop a new health strategy to provide for better services.

117. The decentralisation of our health services will be accelerated with the setting up of five Regional Health Directorates in Mauritius and one in Rodrigues. Arrangements will be made to offer a 24-hour service and emergency care in Area Health Centres. Day care service will be introduced in hospitals.

118. A Family Doctor Service will be introduced. Particular attention will be given to the availability of training facilities for students willing to become medical practitioners. The infrastructure and teaching capacity of the Nursing School will be reinforced to provide for training in basic as well as specialised skills. Continuous medical training will be promoted.

119. A National Institute of Health will be set up to promote efficiency and cost-effectiveness in the Health Sector. In order to provide a better service to the public, a National Survey of Patient Experience will be conducted, a Health Complaints Bureau established and a properly equipped Information Desk will be set up in each hospital.

120. The health infrastructure will be further improved by the construction of specialised hospitals for children and psychiatric patients whilst the existing Dr. Jeetoo and Souillac Hospitals will be completely rebuilt and the whole health service will be computerised.

121. A Dangerous Chemicals' Control Bill will be introduced to replace the Pesticides Control Act of 1972 to *inter-alia* protect workers and the population at large.

122. A proper legislative framework will be enacted to regulate the removal, preservation and transplant of human organs.

123. Government firmly believes that dialogue between the social and economic partners is an imperative need to face the challenges of the new international economic environment and achieve a higher standard of living. Accordingly, a National Economic and Social Development Council will be created as a forum for permanent and meaningful dialogue leading to consensus building on issues of national importance.

124. A comprehensive effort for the modernisation of our labour laws will be undertaken comprising the replacement of the Industrial Relations Act, the revision of the Labour Act and the incorporation of the Workmen's Compensation Scheme under the National Pensions Scheme.

125. Legislation to promote workers' participation in ownership and management of economic enterprises will be introduced.

126. Special attention will be paid to the review of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the promulgation of new safety regulations. The Factory Inspectorate will be provided with the means for effective enforcement of the law.

Honourable Members

127. Access to education and training is an economic imperative for Mauritius to face the challenges of productivity and competitiveness. All stakeholders in Education will be encouraged

to take an active part in the shaping of the educational future of our country and the partnership between the State and the private schools will be strengthened to offer a quality service.

128. Government will ensure equality of educational opportunities through the provision of access to appropriate pedagogical support for all children between ages of 3 and 5. Pre-Primary Schooling Units will be built throughout the island. The Pre-School Trust Fund will be reorganised to provide an appropriate regulatory framework.

129. An 11-year system of compulsory education will be established consisting of 6 years of basic schooling of primary level followed by 5 years of broad based secondary schooling to provide all students with the necessary skills and aptitudes. A technical studies stream will be made available for all interested students at secondary level.

130. A new curriculum for primary schooling will be introduced leading to an examination at the end of the primary cycle. CPE ranking will be replaced by an objective and equitable Grade System allowing for the inclusion of oriental languages without prejudicing the interests of any children. Admission to secondary schools will be regionalised according to a formula guaranteeing a fair measure of parental choice and affording due recognition to the specificities of confessional secondary schools.

131. Government will embark on an accelerated programme of construction of high standard secondary schools and Form VI colleges regionwise. The whole approach to maintenance will be reviewed and infrastructural improvements carried out in existing educational institutions.

132. Performance of all schools will be closely monitored and clear lines of accountability established. All schools will be called upon to embrace a culture of excellence and special support will be extended to low achieving schools in deprived regions. Teacher training and upgrading of skills at all levels will be encouraged. Special consideration will be given to the use of Information Technology and to the teaching of science and technical subjects.

133. Government will implement a new comprehensive strategy for Tertiary education entailing an effective coordination between the institutions concerned and ensuring the optimal utilisation of resources. Measures will be taken to increase the student intake at tertiary level while ensuring accessibility for deserving students of limited means. The quality and relevance of tertiary education will be reviewed and a new impulse given to research at postgraduate level.

134. Human Resource Development remains one of the cornerstones of our development strategy. Government is adopting an integrated approach to Skills Development, training and productivity with the creation of a new Ministry. A National Training Strategy will be formulated with a view to upgrading the knowledge and skills of our labour force and to promote employability.

135. The operation of Industrial and Vocational Training Board will be reviewed, the Levy Grant Scheme re-evaluated and the legal and institutional framework for technical and vocational training revamped. A National Qualifications Framework will be established on the basis of performance indicators and an annual audit of training needs, introduced.

136. Provision will be made for a greater linkage between the educational system and vocational training to meet employment needs. Consideration will be given to the provision of relevant technical education through the establishment of Trade Training Centres and Technical Colleges for school leavers.

Honourable Members

137. Government will strive relentlessly to ensure that women enjoy equal opportunities and equal rights within society and that the gender perspective is fully incorporated in decision making at all levels. A Sex Discrimination Bill will be introduced and existing legislation reviewed to eliminate all remnants of gender discrimination. Special attention will be given to the laws governing

divorce, custody of children and alimony as well as the concept of equal pay for work of equal value. Government will support and encourage Non Governmental Organisations working with women.

138. Support facilities in the nature of kindergartens, laundrettes and canteens will be provided for working women and a specific social benefit introduced for victims of domestic violence.

139. Government will establish new centres for women and increase their access to information and skills development programmes.

140. The need to uphold children's rights as stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the welfare of children will be a foremost concern of Government. A regulatory framework for kindergartens will be provided and training for child carers encouraged. An Early Childhood Development Programme will be introduced.

141. Government will strengthen the child protection services and support the setting up of a National Children's Bureau.

142. A Family Court will be established to ensure that the interests of children are adequately safeguarded in relevant disputes and judicial proceedings.

143. Government is convinced of the need to carry forward the process of modernisation within the Fisheries Sector and ensure the uplift of the fishermen community.

144. A more effective management and monitoring mechanism will be implemented to ensure long-term viability of the industry and for the better protection of the resources of the Exclusive Economic Zone. Outer lagoon fisheries development will be promoted.

145. Fisheries legislation will be reviewed so as to promote more coherent and user friendly techniques. In this context, Government will establish a National Fisheries Development Authority.

146. A package of incentives will be introduced for fishermen comprising compensation for the buy-back programme of fishing nets. Consultations will be initiated for the provision of appropriate compensation to fishermen who have been adversely affected by marine environmental degradation.

147. The operation of the Fishermen Welfare Fund will be expedited so as to respond to the needs of the fishermen community.

148. Additional Fish Aggregate Devices will be installed and the infrastructure for artisanal fisheries improved.

149. Government will also elaborate a development programme for St. Brandon and its surroundings so as to optimise the marine and other resources available in the island.

150. Government believes that the Cooperative movement has an important role to play in raising the standards of living of the vulnerable groups of society and improving their employment generating capacity.

151. The legal and institutional framework for the Cooperative Sector will be reviewed so as to provide for a better and more efficient control of management of co-operative societies.

152. The Handicraft sector will be revitalised through the provision to artisans of better training, counselling, product improvement, marketing and distribution facilities. A closer integration of the Handicraft Sector with the Tourism Sector will be made.

Honourable Members

153. The present local government system, the existing legal framework for the local authorities and the Local Government Service Commission will be thoroughly reviewed, to make them more responsive to the needs of our people.

154. Government will facilitate the task of the Local Authorities by providing for greater decentralisation and administrative and financial autonomy thereby improving the decision making process.

155. Local Authorities will be called upon to play a more proactive role in combatting poverty, improving the quality of life and developing appropriate structures for the promotion of sports, cultural and welfare activities in their specific regions.

156. Government is committed to bringing development in every part of the country. Greater efforts will be made to reduce the disparities between the rural and urban areas in terms of basic infrastructure and to do away with the depressed areas.

157. The Citizen's Advice Bureaux network will be utilized as a vital link between the government and the citizen. In view of their strategic location across the country, the Bureaux will be called upon to spearhead a multi-dimensional development process. The appointment of Parliamentary Private Secretaries and their supervision of the Bureaux will contribute to bridge the gap between the citizen and the Government.

158. Government is strongly committed to the development of Rodrigues and will spare no effort to further integrate the island into the mainstream of social, economic and political development of the State of Mauritius. Recognizing the specificities of the island and of its people, Government will undertake a complete review of the institutional and political structures of Rodrigues. A new Island Council will be set up with extended powers.

159. Government will give urgent attention to the improvement of the water situation in Rodrigues. Particular attention will also be given to land management with special emphasis on the fight against soil erosion. The Agricultural, Fisheries and Tourism Sectors as well as the airport, port and the road infrastructure will be further developed.

160. The private sector will be supported in its efforts to invest and promote job creation in Rodrigues.

161. Communication facilities within the island and between Rodrigues and the other islands of the State of Mauritius will be further improved. A local radio project will be implemented in Rodrigues.

Honourable Members

162. Government is fully conscious that the promotion of culture can be a driving force in nation building and promoting a sense of sharing and national unity.

163. Government will spare no effort to foster cultural values of the Mauritian community.

164. Inter Cultural exchanges will be encouraged through the setting up of a Mauritian Cultural Centre with the aim of promoting and cementing National Unity.

165. Government will continue to preserve and promote ancestral cultures. New legislation will be introduced for the setting up of cultural centres, including those proposed for the Tamil, Telegu and Marathi communities.

166. The First of February will be declared a public holiday to commemorate the abolition of slavery and the termination of indentured labour. A programme of activities will be elaborated to highlight the role played by slaves and indentured labourers in the improvement of the socio-economic development of our society.

167. Appropriate assistance and infrastructural facilities will be extended to our artists to enable local talents to flourish. In this context, the use of the open-air theatre at Pointe Canon will be maximised through the promotion of local folklore, traditions and theatrical performances.

168. Government will actively promote research and publications on the history of Mauritius.

169. Government is aware of the crisis prevailing in the field of sports. Government will as a priority relaunch sport activities on a regional basis and in active partnership with local authorities. An immediate attention will be given to the resumption of football competitions at the national level.

170. Government will initiate appropriate measures to develop and promote sports at grassroot level, while at the same time ensuring that necessary facilities and incentives are provided to top level athletes to enable them to attain higher performance at regional, continental and international levels. Training of Sport Cadres and Sport Animateurs will be given a new boost. The Sports Act 1999 will be amended to provide a better legal framework for sports development.

171. Government will provide improved infrastructure for the advancement of sports in Mauritius as well as in Rodrigues.

172. New Youth Centres will be constructed in different regions and existing ones modernised with a view to providing all young persons with equal access to services and facilities. Youth Centres will be equipped with IT facilities with access to Internet.

Honourable Members,

173. At the dawn of this new millennium, our nation is facing new and daunting challenges which demand that we, as a people, share a common vision of a more prosperous, more equitable, more caring and more harmonious society. The tasks ahead will not be easy but with the commitment and dedication of all our citizens, we shall achieve our goals.

Honourable Members

174. I pray that the blessings of the Almighty may rest upon your counsels.