



**EIGHTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**(UNREVISED)**

**FIRST SESSION**

**TUESDAY 22 APRIL 2025**

**CONTENTS**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**PAPERS LAID**

**MOTION**

**BILLS (*Public*)**

**ADJOURNMENT**

## THE CABINET

(Formed by Dr. the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam)

Dr. the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, GCSK, FRCP	Prime Minister,  Minister of Defence, Home Affairs and External Communications,  Minister of Finance,  Minister for Rodrigues and Outer Islands
Hon. Paul Raymond Bérenger, GCSK.	Deputy Prime Minister
Hon. Shakeel Ahmed Yousuf Abdul Razack Mohamed	Minister of Housing and Lands
Hon. Rajesh Anand Bhagwan	Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change
Dr. the Hon. Arvin Boolell, GOSK.	Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries
Hon. Govindranath Gunness	Minister of National Infrastructure
Hon. Anil Kumar Bachoo, GOSK	Minister of Health and Wellness
Hon. Christian Harold Richard Duval	Minister of Tourism
Hon. Ashok Kumar Subron	Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity
Hon. Gavin Patrick Cyril Glover, SC	Attorney-General
Dr. the Hon. Mrs Jyoti Jeetun	Minister of Financial Services and Economic Planning
Hon. Patrick Gervais Assirvaden	Minister of Energy and Public Utilities

Hon. Dhananjay Ramful	Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
Hon. Darmarajen Nagalingum	Minister of Youth and Sports
Hon. Muhammad Reza Cassam Uteem	Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations
Hon. Mahomed Osman Cassam Mahomed	Minister of Land Transport
Hon. Mrs Marie Arianne Navarre-Marie	Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
Hon. John Michaël Tzoun Sao Yeung Sik Yuen	Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection
Dr. the Hon. Kaviraj Sharma Sukon	Minister of Tertiary Education, Science and Research
Hon. Sayed Muhammad Aadil Ameer Meea	Minister of Industry, SMEs and Cooperatives
Dr. the Hon. Mahend Gungapersad, PDSM	Minister of Education and Human Resource
Dr. the Hon. Avinash Ramtohul	Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation
Hon. Lutchmanah Pentiah	Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reforms
Hon. Ranjiv Wochit, OSK	Minister of Local Government
Hon. Mahendra Gondeea, OSK	Minister of Arts and Culture

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**MAURITIUS**

**Eighth National Assembly**

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**FIRST SESSION**

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**Debate No. 12 of 2025**

**Sitting of Tuesday 22 April 2025**

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis, at 11.30 a.m.

**The National Anthem was played**

*(Madam Speaker in the Chair)*

**ANNOUNCEMENT**  
**OBITUARY**  
**HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS – DEMISE**

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the demise of His Holiness Pope Francis.

Madam Speaker, the whole world learnt with deep sorrow, yesterday morning, of the demise of His Holiness Pope Francis.

I would like to invite you, Madam Speaker, and all the hon. Members of the House, to join me in conveying our heartfelt condolences to the Holy See and the global Roman Catholic community, including Monseigneur Jean-Michaël Durhône, the Bishop of the Diocese of Port Louis, and the faithful of the Roman Catholic Church in Mauritius.

I wish to inform the House that I have sent a letter of condolences to the Holy See on behalf of the Government and people of Mauritius.

Madam Speaker, Mauritius will always remember with gratitude the apostolic visit of His Holiness Pope Francis, which he made to our country in September 2019. His presence amongst us was a moment of grace that remains engraved in the collective memory of all Mauritians, regardless of their faith.

Madam Speaker, His Holiness Pope Francis leaves behind an indelible spiritual and moral legacy. Posterity will remember him as the voice of the poor and the downtrodden, regardless of creed, colour, or gender.

We recall how despite all criticisms levelled against him from certain quarters, he did not hesitate to speak against what he called “a global economic system that exploited the poor and turned the Earth into an immense pile of filth”.

He was a staunch proponent of environmentalism and never ceased to draw attention of the world to the nefarious impact of climate change, especially on the poorest countries.

His role as an apostle of social justice and peace is also universally acknowledged, including his numerous attempts to put an end to global conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, especially the ongoing onslaught in Gaza and Ukraine.

Pope Francis will be immortalised as a paragon of humility in the collective memory of humanity.

May his soul rest in peace!

Madam Speaker, may I request you to invite the hon. Members of the House to observe one minute of silence in his memory.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Deputy Prime Minister!

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, I join with what the hon. Prime Minister has said, and I express my deepest sorrow at the loss of a great Pope and a true friend. Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you. Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

**The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I also join the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, and I request you to convey our deepest condolences to the...

**Madam Speaker:** *À l'Évêché.*

**Mr Lesjongard:** *À l'Évêché de Maurice.*

Madam Speaker, Pope Francis was a Pope for the poor. All throughout, he has been with the poor and has supported them, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I wish to associate myself to the solemn tributes expressed by the hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, and the hon. Leader of the Opposition on the demise of His Holiness Pope Francis.

In recognition of his profound legacy and unwavering commitment to humanity, I will, of course, transmit the condolences of the whole House *à l'Évêché.*

I now invite hon. Members to rise and to observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect to the memory of Pope Francis.

*(Hon. Members stood up and observed a minute of silence)*



**PAPERS LAID**

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Papers have been laid on the Table –

**A. Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection**

The Consumer Protection (Fixed Penalty Notice) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2025. (Government Notice No. 36 of 2025)

**B. Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science and Research**

The Annual Report and Report of the Director of Audit on the Financial Statements of the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre Trust Fund for the year ended 30 June 2021.

**MOTION****SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)**

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that all the business on today's Order Paper be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

**The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.**

*Question put and agreed to.*

**PUBLIC BILLS**

*Second Reading*

**THE SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION (2023-2024) (NO. 2) BILL**

**(NO. VIII OF 2025)**

**&**

**THE SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION (2024-2025) BILL**

**(NO. IX OF 2025)**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

(11.39 a.m.)

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, with your permission, I beg to move that the two Bills be read a second time and considered together.

These two Supplementary Appropriation Bills expose, once again, the irresponsible fiscal stewardship of the previous government. In fact, they confirm what everybody in Mauritius knows, that is, the previous government has dilapidated the finances of the country, and has left public finances in an unprecedented mess. This has been confirmed by the IMF during its recent Article IV Consultation Mission in Mauritius.

This mismanagement of public finances by the previous government has also been confirmed by the Report of the Director of Audit. In fact, the report has exposed a number of scandals and malpractices that have resulted in wastage of public funds, misallocation of resources, and sub-standard outcomes.

Madam Speaker, we are introducing the two Bills by virtue of the provisions of section 105, subsection 3 of the Constitution which stipulates that –

“(3) Where in any financial year it is found –

- (a) that the amount appropriated by the appropriation law for the purposes included in any head of expenditure [which we know as vote of expenditure] is insufficient or that a need has arisen for expenditure for a purpose for which no amount has been appropriated (...)",

then a Supplementary Appropriation Bill needs to be introduced in the National Assembly to provide for the appropriation of those sums.

What is scandalous, Madam Speaker, is that the first Bill, the Supplementary Appropriation (2023-2024) (No. 2) Bill should have been brought by the previous Minister of Finance, especially as he had the opportunity to do so in the first Supplementary Appropriation (2023-2024) Bill, which he introduced in May 2024. The more so that some expenditures such as the increase in pensions were already known at that time; he simply did not.

It is awkward now that I should be the one to bring the Supplementary Appropriation (2023-2024) Bill to the House. The previous Minister of Finance has actually spent money that was not there and, obviously, he wanted to avoid the scrutiny of Parliament.

Nevertheless, in the spirit of the Constitution, let me come to the first Bill, that is, the Supplementary Appropriation (2023-2024) (No. 2) Bill (No. VIII of 2025). In June 2023, the previous government presented an Appropriation Bill for a total sum of Rs174.8 billion, which was in respect of services of government for Financial Year 2023-2024 under votes of expenditure No. 73.

In May 2024, the government introduced a Supplementary Appropriation Bill for an additional sum of Rs6.7 billion. Out of this sum, Rs1.9 million was for the payment of compensation to Patel Engineering Ltd following the award by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in respect to the termination of the lease agreement of a plot of land situated at Les Salines by the then government. This amount excludes another Rs315 million which was paid as fees to the legal advisers of Patel Engineering Ltd. This is yet another case of wastage of public funds resulting from sheer political vendetta.

Another example of expenditure arising from mismanagement was the Rs500 million channelled into MauBank through MauBank Holdings Ltd in addition to some Rs5.1 billion already injected into the bank since its creation.

Now that the accounts of Government for Financial Year 2023-2024 have already been audited and the Report of the Director of Audit has been tabled before the National Assembly, there is need to regularise the excess expenditures incurred under the five votes of expenditure. The total amount to be appropriated is Rs2.8 billion.

The additional appropriation required are as follows –

- (i) Rs197,000 under Vote 1-2 Office of the Vice-President mainly for maintenance of vehicles;
- (ii) Rs2,435,000 under Vote 1-5 Office of the Electoral Commissioner, essentially for the purchase of equipment for the 2024 National Assembly elections;
- (iii) Rs63,835,000 under Vote 1-18 Financial Crimes Commission to enable the Commission to meet its operating expenses;
- (iv) Rs2,643,188,000 under Vote 9-2 Social Security and National Solidarity mainly due to increase in the rate of basic pensions as from April 2024, and lastly
- (v) Rs90,691,000 under Vote 15-1 National Infrastructure mainly for payment of claims in respect to construction and upgrading of roads.

Madam Speaker, the figures clearly demonstrate the irresponsibility of the previous government in public finance management. They announced a budget deficit target of 2.9% of GDP for the Financial Year 2023-2024, but they ended the year with a deficit of 5.7%, almost double the initial target.

The public sector debt figures are more telling. They have been boasting that they had achieved their objective to bring down public sector debt to less than the statutory level of 80% of GDP. They said they would bring the public debt to GDP ratio as at the end of June 2024 down to 73.2%. Instead, Madam Speaker, they increased to 84%.

Let me now come to the second Bill, Madam Speaker, the Supplementary Appropriation (2024-2025) Bill (No. IX of 2025). In June 2024, the previous government presented a budget of Rs216.8 billion for the Financial Year 2024-2025 under votes of expenditure No.72. The 2024-2025 budget is yet another showcase of fiscal irresponsibility. On the one hand, there was a gross exaggeration of the revenue figures, and on the other hand, there was significant under provisioning for expenditures. This was done only to show a lower budget deficit and a declining public sector debt to GDP ratio, yet in another attempt to hoodwink the population. Once again, an illusion!

The Supplementary Appropriation (2024-2025) Bill that we are discussing today makes provision for an additional appropriation of Rs21 billion under five votes of expenditure, where sums initially voted, would not have been sufficient up to June 2025.

It is worth noting, Madam Speaker, that Rs9.3 billion out of the Rs21 billion is mainly a result of under provisioning by the previous government for some original projects and schemes. Rs2.1 billion, is for new decision they took during the course of the year for which no provision was made in the budget. The remaining Rs9.6 billion is for the special effort that we did for the payment of the 14<sup>th</sup> month bonus and the 2025 salary compensation to protect the purchasing power of the population. Let me point out, Madam Speaker, that 90% of employees in the public and private sectors as well as pensioners benefited from the 14<sup>th</sup> month bonus.

Madam Speaker, the five votes of expenditure, the required supplementary appropriation, are as follows –

- (i) Rs1.3 billion under Vote 3-1 for Housing and Land Use planning for the payment of Rs315 million for legal representation to Patel Engineering Ltd; Rs435 million for additional expenditure in connection with the construction of 466 social housing units, and Rs550 million for the acquisition of land for various projects;
- (ii) Rs600 million under Vote 6-1 Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail (Now Ministry of Land Transport) in respect of decision taken for which no provision was initially made. These include the 30% increase in the subsidy payable to bus operators under the free travel scheme and financial support provided to bus companies for the payment of wage relativity adjustment;
- (iii) Rs5.8 billion under Vote 9-2 Social Security and National Solidarity to cater for the payment of the 14<sup>th</sup> month bonus to beneficiaries of the basic pensions, increase in the rate of monthly child allowance payable to retirees, widows, and disabled individuals having dependent children, and the payment of bad weather allowance to professional fishermen;
- (iv) Rs1.5 billion under Vote 18-1 Ministry of Health and Wellness, mainly to clear arrears in payment of overtime as well as for overtime arising from delays in filling vacancies, for increase in prices of medicines, drugs and vaccines, and payment of arrears or for settlement of arrears in respect of medical disposables and equipment;
- (v) Finally, Madam Speaker, Rs11.8 billion under Vote 26-1 Centrally Managed Initiatives of Government to cater for –
  - (i) the payment of 2025 salary compensation to public officers;

- (ii) the payment of an allowance equivalent to 5% of the basic salary subject to a maximum of Rs2,000 as from 01 January 2024 to public sector employees covered by the PRB, pending the implementation of the next PRB report that will fully address the issue of salary relativity.
- (iii) for payment of the 14<sup>th</sup> month bonus to civil servants and officers working in parastatal/statutory bodies, and local authorities;
- (iv) for the transfer to the National Environment Fund to meet expenditure on different projects;
- (v) for additional transfer to the National Resilience Fund to meet new expenditures and under provisioning;
- (vi) for the transfer to the Poverty Reduction Fund in respect of the implementation of the *Prime à l'Emploi Scheme*;
- (vii) for additional expenditure for the CSG Income Allowance and CSG Child Allowance due to higher number of beneficiaries, and
- (viii) for the purchase of Special Drawing Rights from Ukraine under the IMF Voluntary Trading Arrangement.

Madam Speaker, it is worth noting that out of the total of Rs21 billion supplementary appropriation, some Rs5.9 billion will be for the transfer to special funds, namely –

- Rs3.9 billion to the National Resilience Fund;
- Rs1.1 billion to the National Environment Fund, and
- Rs900 million to the Poverty Reduction Fund.

The previous government has depleted the cash balances of these three special funds, which was Rs36.8 billion as at June 2022. As announced in the Government Programme, there will be a reassessment of these funds and appropriate actions will be taken in the forthcoming budget for their consolidation. This will also be in line with the recommendations of the IMF, which asked that we streamline and limit spending from special funds.

Madam Speaker, in the Budget Speech of 2024-2025, the previous Minister of Finance announced, and I quote –

- “365. This year, we have achieved our objective to bring down public sector debt to less than the statutory level of 80 per cent of GDP.
366. By June 2025, we will be largely below that statutory level and closer to our medium-term goal of 60 per cent of GDP.”

However, the actual situation is the complete opposite, as I mentioned. Owing to the legacy left behind by the previous government, the debt ratio is now expected to increase to over 90% by the end of June 2025 – well, well above the statutory level. The budget deficit would be 9.5% of GDP against initial estimates of 3.4%. Never in our history of public finance management has there been such gross exaggeration of revenue and underestimation of expenditure.

This Government, Madam Speaker, is fully committed to a responsible approach to fiscal stewardship. The days of reckless spending, spending on white elephant projects and giving out frivolous allowances and increases, as was practiced by the previous government, are now things of the past. In view of the disastrous state of public finances that we inherited, our top priority is to implement a credible medium term fiscal consolidation plan that will bring down the budget deficit and public sector debt to sustainable levels and ensure medium-term macroeconomic stability. We will put our resources where it will have the highest impact in advancing our economic development and uplift the living conditions of our people. Madam Speaker, we will rebuild the fiscal space, promote economic growth, while at the same time, protect the most vulnerable.

Details on the items of expenditure concerned as well as explanatory notes thereon are set out in the Estimates of the Supplementary Expenditure which have already been laid in the National Assembly, together with the Supplementary Appropriation Bills.

Before I conclude, Madam Speaker, I would like to inform the House that there has been a typographical oversight in the Schedule of the Supplementary Appropriation (2024-2025) Bill under the heading Vote of Expenditure in Schedule 9-1. It should have read 9-2; this will be corrected.

With these remarks, Madam Speaker, I commend the Bill to the House.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you.

**The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.**

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, hon. Leader of the Opposition, would you like to say a few words?

(11.54 a.m.)

**The Leader of the Opposition (Mr G. Lesjongard):** Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me this opportunity today to intervene on these two Supplementary Appropriation Bills, which is a normal process and this will not be the first time or the last time that we are voting a Supplementary Appropriation Bill in this House. I share some of the views expressed by the hon. Prime Minister, but not all, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, today we are tasked, in this august Assembly, to vote for two estimates; the first one for an amount of Rs 2,800,346,000 and the second one for Rs21 billion and I take note that a huge chunk of this amount will be used to cater for social benefits under the Ministry of Social Security and National Solidarity, such as pensions, Child Allowance and CSG benefits. And, I believe this is the right thing to do, Madam Speaker.

There is also a considerable amount of money which is being allocated for the 14<sup>th</sup> Month Bonus. I do commend the hon. Prime Minister for honouring this commitment which was first made by *l'Alliance Lepep*, that is, the 14<sup>th</sup> Month Bonus, and then *l'Alliance du Changement* followed suit, Madam Speaker. Although that 14<sup>th</sup> Month Bonus was promised across the board, we know that only those earning a salary less than Rs50,000 benefited from the 14<sup>th</sup> month salary.

Madam Speaker, with your permission, I would like to dwell a bit further into the details of the Bills, such as for example, *Item 3113-003* on page 14 of the Estimates regarding the Construction and Upgrading of Roads.

**Madam Speaker:** I am sorry, maybe you might want to keep this for the Committee of Supply in a while?

**Mr Lesjongard:** I will just say a few words.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, but general. General words!

**Mr Lesjongard:** Yes, because it deals with the construction of public infrastructure and I believe it is vital to improve traffic. For example, as stated...

**The Prime Minister:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker!



**Madam Speaker:** Yes, one moment.

**The Prime Minister:** He is not saying which Bill he is referring to.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, tell us if it is the first or second Bill!

**Mr Lesjongard:** The second one, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Second Bill, alright.

**Mr Lesjongard:** The second one. Like I said, Madam Speaker, it is good to improve public infrastructure, especially if this deals with the improvement of traffic in the regions of Vacoas and Curepipe and it will also provide access for those travelling from airport to Flic en Flac.

Madam Speaker, I also note that provision is being made for further improvement of road infrastructure towards Ganga Talao to facilitate pilgrims' access during Maha Shivaratri.

Madam Speaker, now coming to the Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2024-2025, I notice that Rs235 million is being allocated as Child Allowance and another Rs300 million as CSG Child Allowance to cater for the higher number of beneficiaries. We know that initially it was for an amount of Rs2,000 and it has been increased to Rs2,500 in the previous budget, and would have been increased – like I said – to Rs5,000 had the *Alliance Lepep* won the last general elections.

*(Interruptions)*

I am not sure if the present Government will increase this allowance but I would urge the Government not to remove this allowance in the forthcoming budget as many young parents, Madam Speaker, depend on this sum to cope with the increase in prices which has impacted products which are directly related to a baby's wellbeing.

Madam Speaker, same goes for the CSG benefits and the CSG Income Allowance. I also see that a sum of Rs315 million and Rs1,150,000,000 are being voted in this Bill and we know that around 500,000 Mauritians benefit from the CSG allowances.

Now, Madam Speaker, depending on the category of workers, these workers can earn between a thousand to three thousand rupees every three months and believe it or not, Madam Speaker, this makes a huge difference for those employees whose earnings have been heavily impacted by the constant increase in the prices of commodities over the last three months and

coupled with two other issues, that is, the increase in repo rate and maintaining the prices of Mogas and Gasoil.

Again, Madam Speaker, I will stress on Government to give due consideration in maintaining the CSG benefits to all the beneficiaries as this sum helps and supports a lot of Mauritian families.

Madam Speaker, now, let me come to salary relativity adjustment. The previous regime introduced the minimum salary in 2018. This has consistently been increased until we have reached a guaranteed minimum wage of Rs20,000. I believe this also, Madam Speaker, helps Mauritian families to meet the increase in cost of living. I am sure, maybe in the forthcoming budget, there will be an increase in the minimum salary.

However, Madam Speaker, salary relativity is essential to ensure that all categories of workers, be it in the public sector or in the private sector, earn a salary that is worth their position, experience and effort. I am sure Government will address same.

Let me sum up, Madam Speaker, by saying that when it comes to social agenda, this Government will have my full support. I reiterate and I hope this does not fall in deaf ears, Madam Speaker. There is a huge effort that has been made over the past five years to reduce inequalities between categories of workers and social groups. The introduction and constant increase of the minimum wage, coupled with other allowances, such as the CSG Allowance and the Child Allowance, have helped support vulnerable families, especially in the wake of an increase in prices of basic commodities.

So, to conclude, Madam Speaker, I will urge the Government, if you do not intend to increase these allowances; at least, leave these facilities and allowances untouched.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you, hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Prime Minister, your winding-up speech!

(12.03 p.m.)

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, yes, I am winding up. But I cannot find in the second Bill the reference about construction and the expenses that you mentioned. Maybe it is in the first Bill.

**Mr Lesjongard:** The first one.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Prime Minister, it might be easier for everyone if the hon. Leader of the Opposition takes it up again when we reach the Committee of Supply. Because, now, we are making an overall...

**The Prime Minister:** Yes! Then, we can do it.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes! If you do not mind, hon. Leader of the Opposition, you can come back on this later on during the Committee of Supply.

**The Prime Minister:** No, but he is wrong. It's not there.

**Madam Speaker:** Let us have your winding-up speech, please!

**The Prime Minister:** Just to say, Madam Speaker, that it is very plain. I have said it at the beginning of my speech that they have just spent, spent and spent money that was not there! So, what did they do? They printed money!

Any young person here who has done Economics would know what happens when you print money and you put it in circulation. You increase inflation, you depreciate your rupee, and prices go up. This is what we are living with today.

People expect magic! We are trying! We are trying to stabilise the rupee and to make prices go down. But it will take time because this is what has happened. So much money was put in circulation. I am surprised that, in fact, the hon. Leader of the Opposition even wanted to speak on the Bill because this is the situation. We had promised the 14<sup>th</sup> month bonus; we did the maximum that we could. We absolutely cannot wreck the country and the economy. We did not even know that they had done so much damage. So, this is what we have done.

This is why I am saying – it is very simple, Madam Speaker – we can only make sure that we bring the debt level down; it cannot be 90%! If we do that, Moody's will absolutely and surely want to downgrade us! This is what we want to avoid. If Moody's downgrades us, it will not be because of us; it will be because of them. But the consequences for the country

are going to be terrible. They will describe us as ‘junk status’, which means there will be no investment. Nobody will want to invest in a country where you are not... A ‘junk status’ means that when you invest in the country, you are not sure that you will get your money back. So, who is going to invest? This is why we absolutely want to avoid a downgrading by Moody’s, but the situation is terrible. 90% of debt – we have to make a lot of effort to bring that down.

We talk about statutory – 80%. When I was Prime Minister, it was 60%. Maybe when you came, you increased it to 80%. I do not know! But it was 60%. When I left in 2014, it was just below 60% – 59.8 something per cent. But it was below 60%! Below the target! This is what they have done with the economy during the 10 years!

This is what I wanted to say, Madam Speaker. This is what we are trying to do, and this is what we will do.

**Madam Speaker:** Will you, please, commend the Bill again to House, hon. Prime Minister?

**The Prime Minister:** I commend both Bills to the House, Madam Speaker.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bills read a second time and committed.*

## ANNOUNCEMENT

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY – TIME ALLOCATION

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, before we proceed with the Committee of Supply, I have to inform the House that an indicative time allocation has been worked out and agreed upon by the Whips in regard to each Vote Item, wherever applicable.

As we proceed, the time allocation will be announced, and I will exercise some flexibility wherever the need arises. We will proceed page by page for the orderly conduct of the Committee of Supply.

I further wish to draw the attention of hon. Members to Standing Order 73 (3), which reads as follows –

“(…) Discussions at the Committee shall be confined to the details of the Estimates and shall not refer to the general principles of Government policy and administration.”

I appeal to hon. Members to be brief in their questions, and hon. Ministers to be brief in their replies. I rely on your collaboration.

We will start with the consideration of Estimates of Supplementary Expenditure (2023-2024) (No. 2) Bill of 2025.

### **COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY**

*(Madam Speaker in the Chair)*

*The Estimates of the Supplementary Expenditure (2023-2024) (No. 2) Bill and the Supplementary Appropriation (2023-2024) (No. 2) Bill (No. VIII of 2025) were considered and agreed to.*

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

### **PUBLIC BILLS**

*Third Reading*

*On motion made and seconded, the Supplementary Appropriation (2023-2024) (No. 2) Bill (No. VIII of 2025) was read a third time and passed.*

### **COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY**

*(Madam Speaker in the Chair)*

### **ESTIMATES OF SUPPLEMENTARY EXPENDITURE (2024-2025) BILL**

**&**

### **THE SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION (2024-2025) Bill**

**(NO. IX OF 2025)**

(12.15 p.m.)

*Vote 3-1 Housing and Land Use Planning was called.*

**Mr A. Duval:** Madam Speaker?

**Madam Chairperson:** I am sorry.

**Mr A. Duval:** I have a question.

**Madam Chairperson:** Yes!

**Mr A. Duval:** Yes, Madam Chairperson, with regard to...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Chairperson:** Come on! Let him speak, please!

**Mr A. Duval:** But Committee, we can sit down.

**Madam Chairperson:** For Committee? Okay! Thank you for telling me.

**Mr A. Duval:** Yes, thank you. I would like to know for the construction of social housing units, I see there is provision for 466...

**Madam Chairperson:** Maybe you should allow me at least to go through that and then I will give you time to speak on that item. Is that what you want, is to speak on that item?

**Mr A. Duval:** Okay.

**Madam Chairperson:** Okay, I was saying the question is that the sum of Rs1,300,000 for Vote 3-1 Housing and Land Use Planning stands part of the Schedule. Now you want to query that?

**Mr A. Duval:** Yes!

**Madam Chairperson:** Yes, please!

**Mr A. Duval:** So, I would like to know firstly, Madam Chairperson, for the 466 housing units that have been constructed, can we have an estimate of completion and secondly, the total number of housing units?

*(Interruptions)*

No, for Committee of Supply you don't stand up!

**Madam Chairperson:** We are all learning.

**An hon. Member:** No, for Committee, you stand up!

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Chairperson:** Some are not. I am learning. Don't worry! The Minister will reply. You have finished?

**Mr A. Duval:** Yes, so, my question is the estimate time and the total completion under that project.

**Madam Chairperson:** Yes, hon. Minister!

**Mr Mohamed:** Madam Chairperson, there are 466 houses as per the document that has been circulated and for the completion dates, there are different dates there, and I can table the document. But for Solitude, 17 units have already been handed over to beneficiaries.

**Madam Chairperson:** I can't hear you, Minister. I am so sorry.

**Mr Mohamed:** That is quite rare!

**Madam Chairperson:** Probably it's me!

**Mr Mohamed:** It's age, I guess!

**Madam Chairperson:** Say it again!

**Mr Mohamed:** I say it again –

- 17 units have been handed over to beneficiaries for Solitude 1.
- Melrose – progress status 86%, expected completion date 31 May 2025.
- Solitude 2 – expected completion date June 2025.
- Henrietta – expected completion date 30 July 2025.
- Wooton – expected completion date August 2025.
- Sebastopol – expected completion date 31 August 2025.
- Quatre Cocos – 31 August 2025, and
- Camp Ithier – 31 August 2025.

As I have said, it is 466.

**Madam Chairperson:** Okay, let me just clear the issue of procedure. It seems *qu'il y a un flottement, parce qu'à l'époque vous étiez toujours resté assis, n'est-ce pas?* We just checked. When addressing the House, a Member must stand up. Okay, it's not a question of Committee of Supply or not, but I am sure that it is because at one point, you were all...

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** *Zot ti pe asize zot ti kokin!*

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Chairperson:** Are you happy with the answer, hon. Member?

**Mr A. Duval:** Yes.

**Madam Chairperson:** Stand up!

**Mr A. Duval:** Yes, the second question I asked was for the total project of construction...

**Madam Chairperson:** Yes, maybe he didn't give. Did you give the total?

**Mr A. Duval:** Because this is supplementary appropriation, I wanted to know how many houses were completed under the whole construction.

**Mr Mohamed:** Under that particular item, there are 466 houses and the project cost is for Rs1,460,742,759.32 and the total expenditure to date is Rs4,801,828.04.

**Madam Chairperson:** Okay.

Hon. Juman, yes!

**Mr Juman:** Thank you, Madam Chairperson. On the same Item ...

**Madam Chairperson:** Same Item? Yes.

**Mr Juman:** Yes! Can I know from the hon. Minister, the total amount paid as consultancy fee and if he can table the list of beneficiaries?

**An hon. Member:** *La ki ena zafer la!*

**Mr Mohamed:** Madam Chairperson, I do not have the details as far as consultancy fee is concerned but I undertake to table it. However, as far as beneficiaries are concerned, it would not be proper, I believe, for me to table the list of beneficiaries but what I may say is that, as I have stated earlier on, in all those houses, the previous government had pretended that they had been delivering a lot of houses but only 17 out of the 466 have been delivered.

**Madam Chairperson:** 70?

**Mr Mohamed:** And, out of the 8000 that have to be built, less than 50 have been delivered.

**Mr Jhummun:** Less than?

**Mr Mohamed:** 50!



**An hon. Member:** Shame! Shame!

**Mr Mohamed:** So, if the hon. Member wanted to score by trying to obtain an answer that they delivered – in fact, no! They failed! Thank you.

**Ms Anquetil:** Own goal! Own goal!

**Mr Mohamed:** You wanted to show that they failed!

**Madam Chairperson:** Anyone else on that Item?

**Mr Mohamed:** I know you want to fail your partner or your ex-partner.

**Madam Chairperson:** Anyone else? Yes!

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** *Poz kestion enkor do!*

**An hon. Member:** *Dimann Obeegadoo!*

**Madam Chairperson:** Mr Juman! DPM, please! Mr Juman wants to put a question.

**Mr Juman:** Sorry, Madam Chairperson, I do not know if it is right when the hon. Minister said it is not proper for him to table the list of beneficiaries...

**Madam Chairperson:** Beneficiaries?

**Mr Juman:** ... because we are in Committee of Supply, we want to know. We have the right to know who the beneficiaries are.

**Mr Jhummun:** Some of the names!

**Mr Juman:** ...what works they have ...

**Mr Mohamed:** Does the hon. Member mean beneficiaries of each house; the 17 houses?

**Mr Juman:** No! No! The consultancy fee.

**Mr Mohamed:** Oh! That Item!

**Madam Chairperson:** Consultancy!

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** *Sa wi !*

**Mr Mohamed:** So, they would not be qualified, if I may, as beneficiaries; let's say as service providers. And, I will table the details.

**Madam Chairperson:** You will table that, okay. Not beneficiaries of Houses!

**Mr Bhagwan:** *La dan mem zot inn tap plis la!*

**Madam Chairperson:** Okay, anyone else? Next!

**An hon. Member:** *Copin!*

*Vote 3-1 Housing and Land Use Planning (Rs1,300,000,000) was, on question put, agreed to.*

(12.22 p.m.)

*Vote 6-1 Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail was called.*

**Madam Chairperson:** Anybody wants to query?

*Vote 6-1 Ministry of Land Transport and Light Rail (Rs600,000,000) was, on question put, agreed to.*

(12.23 p.m.)

**Madam Chairperson:** Il faut essayer de suivre là. Je vais m'arrêter un petit moment, ça me donne le temps de respirer. Et, vous, ça vous donne le temps de poser des questions. *Okay?*

*Vote 9-2 Social Security and National Solidarity was called.*

**Madam Chairperson:** Questions anyone?

**Mr A. Duval:** Question, Madam Chairperson!

**Madam Chairperson:** Yes, question! Stand up, please!

**Mr A. Duval:** Thank you. Madam Chairperson, I would like to know how many beneficiaries are benefitting from child allowance as at now?

**Madam Chairperson:** Fair enough!

Yes, hon. Minister!

**Mr Subron:** Yes, I don't have...

**Madam Chairperson:** Stand up, please!

**Mr Subron:** I don't have this information right now but I will table the information to the House.

**Madam Chairperson:** Okay, alright! Anyone else?

**Mr A. Duval:** I have another question!

**Madam Chairperson:** Yes, stand up, please!

**Mr A. Duval:** Yes, with regards to payment of bad weather allowance, social aid, again, if I may know what is the amount paid and how many beneficiaries – fishermen benefit from bad weather allowance?

**Madam Chairperson:** Bad weather?

**Mr A. Duval:** So, what is the amount that they benefit from and the number of beneficiaries?

**Madam Chairperson:** Amount and number? Yes!

**Mr Subron:** May I know which number the hon. Member is referring to?

**Mr A. Duval:** It's *Item 9 –202!*

**Madam Chairperson:** That's it!

**Mr A. Duval:** The first Item!

**Madam Chairperson:** Social Protection!

**Mr Subron:** Yes, again, I don't have the information. I will table the information.

*Vote 9-2 Social Security and National Solidarity (Rs5,800,000,000) was, on question put, agreed to.*

(12.25 p.m.)

*Vote 18-1 Ministry of Health and Wellness was called.*

**Madam Chairperson:** Yes, Dr. Aumeer!

**Dr. Aumeer:** Thank you, Madam. Just asking for a few details with regards to *Item 18-102* where it says 'delays in filling of vacancies', could the hon. Minister give us details of the list of vacancies that are to be filled. And, secondly, in terms of arrears, which type of arrears are we talking about since there had been so much talk about working staff of the Ministry having not been paid overtime?

Thank you.

**Madam Chairperson:** Filling of vacancies and payment of allowances, right?

**Mr Bachoo:** I will give you the answer. It's so long that I will take a bit of time. I do have it.

You know, the reasons for performing overtime, filling of vacancies...

**Madam Chairperson:** There you are, hon. Minister!

**Mr Bachoo:** Madam Chairperson, there are plenty of vacancies which had not been filled as a result of which, we had to spend enormous sum of money in overtime. A lot of money had been spent because vacancies were not filled and I have got a long list, if I am going to start, it will take time.

**Madam Chairperson:** No, don't read!

**Mr Bachoo:** So, I am going to table it just now. A long list of vacancies and as the result of which we had to pay...

**Madam Chairperson:** Overtime!

**Mr Bachoo:** ... a huge sum of money as overtime!

**Madam Chairperson:** Alright!

Yes, please. Stand up!

**Mr A. Duval:** Yes, I had exactly a similar question. I wanted to know how many health practitioners, doctors, are practicing now and how many are needed? So, what it is...

**Madam Chairperson:** No! No! Can't expect! Come with a question! He can't do that now!

**Mr A. Duval:** ...the gap that is missing?

**An hon. Member:** *Apré to dir to ti enn* Speaker!

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Chairperson:** Hon. Juman!

**Mr Juman:** Thank you, Madam Chairperson. On the same Item number, can I ask the hon. Minister, the total amount of overtime due to-date and it dates back to when?

**Madam Chairperson:** Total amount of overtime due to date, hon. Minister?

**Mr Juman:** And it dates back to when?

**Mr Bachoo:** Thank you, Chairman, I have got atleast 10 pages. So, it will be very difficult...

**Madam Speaker:** Call me, Madam Chairperson, please!

**Mr Bachoo:** Madam Chairperson...

**Madam Chairperson:** I have not changed since last time!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Bachoo:** Madam Chairperson, I am sorry! I am sorry!

*(Interruptions)*

So, Madam Chairperson, I have got a long list of about ten pages. It is very difficult for me to read. I am going to table it.

**Madam Chairperson:** Yes, hon. Dr. Prayag!

**Dr. Prayag:** Madam Chairman...

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Chairperson:** *Non! ce n'est pas possible !* Honestly!

Be gender-sensitive, please!

**Dr. Prayag:** Sorry, Madam Chairperson! Would the hon. Minister, kindly, also table the detailed list of the *Item 2214005: Medical Disposables and Minor Equipment* about the increase in prices and settlement of arrears for the additional provisions of the products required?

Can we have a detailed breakdown of the products that the prices have increased as well as the settlement in the arrears? We would like to know which products were in the settlement as well as the companies who were providing same?

**Madam Chairperson:** It's a very tall order for Committee of Supply!

**Mr Bachoo:** It is about 25-30 pages. I am submitting all.

**Madam Chairperson:** Of course!

**Mr Bachoo:** It is very difficult for me to read it all.

**Madam Chairperson:** That will help you for further questions later, okay?

Are we done? Yes!

*Vote 18-1 Ministry of Health and Wellness (Rs1,500,000,000) was, on question put, agreed to.*

(12.30 p.m.)

*Vote 26-1 Centrally Managed Initiatives of Government was called.*

**Madam Chairperson:** Questions? Queries?

**Mr A. Duval:** Madam Speaker, for the 14<sup>th</sup> month bonus, I would like to know, to date, the exact number of employees who have not benefited and who have not received payment of the 14<sup>th</sup> month bonus.

**Madam Chairperson:** Yes!

**The Prime Minister:** In fact, we said slightly over 90%. So, only 10%. I can give you the exact figures, but this is what it is.

**Madam Chairperson:** 10% have not received?

**An hon. Member:** Less than 10%.

**Madam Chairperson:** Less than, okay. Another one!

**Mr A. Duval:** Yes, I have a question. I am not sure the hon. Prime Minister will be able to answer in detail for the 14<sup>th</sup> month bonus. Concerning the 10%, may we know from the 10% that have not been paid – provisions have been made for leveling of fines – is the hon. Prime Minister able to say what actions are being taken to ensure payment?

*(Interruptions)*

**Madam Chairperson:** Non, non! Là, on ne peut pas...

*(Interruptions)*

One moment!

*(Interruptions)*

This is a matter of policy. It cannot be raised here, I am sorry!

**Mr Jhummun:** *Lakes vid!*

*Vote 26-1 Centrally Managed Initiatives of Government (Rs11,800,000,000) was, on question put, agreed to.*

*The Estimates of Supplementary Expenditure (2024-2025) of 2025 and the Supplementary Appropriation (2024-2025) Bill (No. IX of 2025) were considered and agreed to.*

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

## **PUBLIC BILLS**

### *Third Reading*

*On motion made and seconded, the Supplementary Appropriation (2024-2025) Bill (No. IX of 2025) was read a third time and passed.*

**Madam Speaker:** I propose that we break for lunch. We will resume at two o'clock.

*At 12.34 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.*

*On resuming at 2.03 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.*

**Madam Speaker:** Please be seated!

Hon. Members, I just came back from *l'Évêché* where I met Mgr Durhône on your behalf. So, I personally transmitted to him what we said this morning. I think the hon. Prime Minister went just before me. Mgr Durhône wants me to convey to you his thanks for your deep sympathies.

Thank you.

## **PUBLIC BILLS**

### *Second Reading*

## **THE NATIONAL AGENCY FOR DRUG CONTROL BILL**

### **(NO. VI OF 2025)**

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the Second Reading of the National Agency for Drug Control Bill (No. VI of 2025).*

*Question again proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Deputy Prime Minister, the floor is yours!

(2.04 p.m.)

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** *Madam Speaker*, un des plus grands crimes du MSM ces dernières années a été la drogue. Un des plus grands échecs du MSM ces dix dernières années a été la drogue.

Un crime en particulier a été commis quand le gouvernement MSM a dissous, dans les circonstances que l'on sait, la *NATReSA* sans remplacer cette institution, qui avait ses défauts et ses faiblesses, mais qui avait le mérite d'exister. Ils ont dissous la *NATReSA* et ils se sont rendus coupables tout au long de ces dix dernières années d'une complicité quotidienne, active, avec les barons de la drogue, avec les gros importateurs et avec les trafiquants en général.

C'est pourquoi, *Madam Speaker*, une des top priorités de l'Alliance du Changement, c'est précisément la lutte/le combat contre la drogue. Une des urgences de ce gouvernement, c'est d'abattre le monstre de la drogue.

C'est pourquoi, vous en souviendrez, Madame la présidente, lorsque j'ai parlé sur le programme gouvernemental 2025-2029, le 07 mai, je m'étais permis de dire que, de mon point de vue, les deux urgences des urgences ces jours-ci sont la drogue et l'électricité. Le risque qui nous pend au bout du nez, c'est l'électricité. Mais la drogue tue déjà. La drogue martyrise déjà, surtout les jeunes. Mais pas seulement les jeunes, malheureusement ! Surtout la drogue synthétique, ce monstre que c'est devenu.

C'est pourquoi, pour nous, *Madam Speaker*, il nous faut réaliser et faire deux choses urgentes en même temps. Deux choses qui sont séparées, je m'expliquerai, mais qui sont liées. D'une part, casser les reins des barons de la drogue et casser les reins du trafic de drogues. Et ensuite, réhabiliter et aider les victimes. C'est pourquoi, tout au long de l'existence du MMM, nous n'avons jamais raté une occasion de faire la différence entre les criminels, les trafiquants, les victimes, et les malades. Surtout, aujourd'hui, les jeunes.

C'est plus facilement dit que le faire, de combattre ces deux choses en même temps. Casser les reins des importateurs de drogues, des trafiquants de drogues et, en même temps, aider ceux qui sont tombés des victimes de la drogue.

En ce qui concerne le combat contre le trafic de la drogue, les choses sont aujourd'hui entre les bonnes mains du nouveau Premier ministre. Le nouveau commissaire de police et le nouvel *ADSU* sont déjà au travail et donnent déjà des résultats. Mais il faudra faire dix fois, voire cent fois plus. Le commissaire de police est conscient de ses responsabilités. *L'ADSU* devra tout le temps faire mieux, faire plus et progresser.



Cela n'est pas devant cette Chambre aujourd'hui. Ce n'est pas de cela que nous sommes appelés à discuter. Bien sûr, la plupart des orateurs, et moi-même, font référence à la source du mal : l'importation et le trafic de la drogue. Mais, aujourd'hui, ce qui est devant nous, c'est l'autre moitié du travail. C'est-à-dire aider et réhabiliter. C'est cela qui est devant cette Chambre aujourd'hui : *prevention, treatment and rehabilitation*. C'est ce qui est devant nous ces jours-ci et devant cette Chambre.

Ce que nous avons apporté devant cette Chambre est un *NATReSA* complètement et profondément amélioré et renforcé. Nous avons fait un travail d'équipe pour présenter quelque chose de vraiment solide. Un *NATReSA* profondément renforcé et amélioré, avec à la tête – c'est tout un symbole. Mais en même temps, c'est toute une réalité – le Premier ministre, le vice-Premier ministre du pays, pas moins de 16 ministres et le chef commissaire de Rodrigues. Tout le monde est embrigadé dans cette lutte pour *prevention, treatment and rehabilitation* des victimes/des drogués.

D'une part, donc, il y a le *National Agency for Drug Control*, présidé par le Premier ministre et toute une équipe de ministres pour *supervise*, insuffler, inspirer à travers un *National Drug Control Commission*, le combat – parce que cela aussi c'est un combat – pour aider les victimes de la drogue. Il y a donc dans ce texte de loi un *National Agency for Drug Control* dirigé par un *Board* pour le combat au jour le jour pour aider les drogués, pour aider les victimes de la drogue. Ce *Board* sera présidé par Monsieur Sam Lauthan avec le Dr. Fayzal Sulliman comme *Chief Executive*.

Nous, les responsables politiques, le Premier ministre, le vice-Premier ministre, je le répète que pas moins que 16 ministres et le Chef Commissaire de Rodrigues, nous serons là pour suivre, pour aider, pour donner du souffle, l'inspiration dans un combat peut-être aussi difficile que le combat contre trafiquants de drogue, celui pour aider les victimes. Donc, il y aura Monsieur Sam Lauthan et le Dr. Fayzal Sulliman pour faire le travail, donner des résultats et aider les victimes.

*Madam Speaker*, tout le monde connaît le combat sans relâche et sans peur de Sam Lauthan, je n'ai pas besoin de le présenter, contre la drogue au péril de sa vie. Et tout le monde connaît la valeur du Dr. Sulliman qui a une longue et riche carrière au Nations unies et dans beaucoup de pays du monde. Ce combat, parce que je le répète, cela aussi c'est un combat pour aider les victimes de la drogue. Nous avons beaucoup travaillé en équipe, Madame la présidente.

The *Prime Minister's Office* et le Premier ministre lui-même, toute une gamme de ministres, à commencer par *l'Attorney General* et son équipe que je remercie et je salue pour tout le travail abattu, et Sam Lauthan et le Dr. Sulliman nous ont bien aidé pour amener ce texte de loi-là. Cela n'a pas été facile, mais on a travaillé vite – que quelques mois après les élections générales – parce qu'une de nos priorités a été la préparation de ce texte de loi pour faire la moitié du travail. Je le répète, le travail de répression des trafiquants, des importateurs, etc. ce travail-là est entre les bonnes mains du Premier ministre, du nouveau Commissaire de police et du nouvelle ADSU. Maintenant, ce que nous créons aujourd'hui aura l'immense responsabilité de faire l'autre moitié du travail, c'est-à-dire d'aider surtout les jeunes, mais les victimes de la drogue en général – homme comme femme d'ailleurs. Nous avons beaucoup travaillé en équipe, le résultat est devant vous et devant cette Chambre. Je le répète, un NATReSA complètement, profondément amélioré et renforcé. Nous avons une obligation de résultat. Aucun homme, aucune femme de l'île Maurice ne peut rester le cœur insensible devant ce qu'on constate tous les jours en ce qui concerne les ravages de la drogue surtout parmi les jeunes.

Nous avons produit un NATReSA profondément renforcé et amélioré, Madame la présidente. Mais comme j'ai l'habitude de le dire, nous resterons ouverts à des améliorations. Nous ne croyons pas avoir toutes les réponses. Nous avons fait notre travail, nous avons le droit d'en être fiers, pas d'avoir la grosse tête mais d'en être fiers, nous avons fait le travail, mais nous restons et nous resterons à l'écoute. Nous resterons ouverts à des améliorations. Seulement de grâce, donnez le temps à cette nouvelle institution de fonctionner. C'est à l'expérience que nous verrons ce qu'il faut améliorer, ce qu'il faut renforcer, ce qu'il faut changer même. C'est une grande aventure dans laquelle nous nous sommes tous engagés, aujourd'hui parlementaire, demain responsable à la tête et au sein de cette organisation.

Le *Board* du *National Agency for Drug Control*, je tiens à le souligner, inclus six ONG, six forces vives, six organisations non-gouvernementales qui seront choisies, qui seront nommées par le Premier ministre après toutes les consultations nécessaires. Et, il y aura – j'en suis certain et il faut que ce soit ainsi – des débats, il n'y aura pas seulement du travail fait pour aider des victimes mais aura aussi des débats ; des débats en profondeur autour de tout le problème de la drogue, des victimes de la drogue et des façons de les aider.

Nous sommes condamnés à un débat permanent pour trouver à chaque fois de nouvelles solutions et ce n'est pas les trafiquants de drogue qui manquent d'imagination ces temps-ci, malheureusement. Donc, il y aura des débats ouverts, approfondis au sein de ce *Board* du

*National Agency for Drug Control*. Et, j'allais oublier de dire, je suis certain que le Premier ministre, et nous tous ensemble, quand nous choisirons ces six O.N.G. qui participeront avec les experts à ces débats, il faudra veiller à ce que tous les courants de pensée soient représentés. Il ne faut pas juger d'avance, décidé d'avance ce qui est bon, ce qui est mauvais. Il faudra que tous les courants de pensée se retrouvent au niveau de ce *Board* et qu'il y ait des débats vraiment libres et approfondis ; des débats y compris sur la question du gandia qui est d'actualité ces temps-ci.

Il faut que ce soit discuté en profondeur au niveau du *Board* et c'est finalement le *National Agency for Drug Control* présidé par le Premier ministre qui tranchera la question ; pas à toute vitesse et dans n'importe quelles conditions, mais à tête reposée, à tête réfléchie. Il y a de graves décisions, il n'y a pas seulement un travail terrible et énorme à faire, mais il y a aussi une réflexion, il y a des débats à provoquer pour amener d'autres changements, Madame la présidente.

Je tiens à souligner que le *Board* du *National Agency for Drug Control* travaillera, il le faut, avec le ministère des sports et des loisirs. Le ministère des sports et des loisirs aura un rôle clé à jouer dans ce combat et c'est pourquoi d'ailleurs, le ministre des sports et des loisirs sera sur la Commission et le représentant du ministère sur le *Board* du *National Agency for Drug Control*. Mais, pas seulement le ministère des sports et des loisirs, il faudra aussi que les municipalités et demain, les nouvelles municipalités, les municipalités ressuscitées dans les jours à venir, il faut que les municipalités, des mêmes que les *District Councils* jouent un rôle qu'ils ont joué dans le passé.

Vous vous souviendrez vous-même, Madame la présidente, de l'époque où les sports et les loisirs au niveau des municipalités remplissaient vraiment un rôle extraordinaire. Ce temps va revenir ; ce temps doit revenir ! On crée aujourd'hui, une organisation terriblement importante qui n'a pas le droit d'échouer, mais en même temps, nous avons le droit de compter aussi sur les municipalités, et demain les *District Councils* réformés, de même, comme je le disais, sur le sport et les loisirs pour nous aider dans cette lutte – oh combien difficile, mais exaltante qui nous attend pour aider toutes les victimes de la drogue.

*Madam Speaker*, je terminerai en disant, un des plus grands défis qui est devant nous, c'est de réussir ce combat contre la drogue, casser les reins des trafiquants de la drogue – pas de blablabla comme certains durant ces dernières dix années, mais vraiment, même si c'est nécessaire au risque de nos vies, casser les reins d'une part aux trafiquants de la drogue, mais

d'autre part, aider nuit et jour les victimes de la drogue. C'est un des grands défis que nous avons à relever. C'est pourquoi c'est une des top priorités de ce gouvernement du changement. Nous devons gagner le combat contre la drogue, et je suis persuadé, Madame la présidente, que nous gagnerons ce combat tous ensemble.

Merci.

**Madam Speaker:** Je vous remercie.

Je passe maintenant la parole à la députée de Port Louis Nord et Montagne Longue.

(2.22 p.m.)

**Mrs A. Savabaddy (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue):** Merci, Madame la présidente, de me donner l'opportunité aujourd'hui d'intervenir sur cet important texte de loi, qui doit venir – je dirais – soulager les larmes de ces milliers de parents et d'individus qui souffrent. Nous n'allons pas réécrire l'histoire.

L'honorable Premier ministre a rappelé durant son intervention la semaine dernière, comment le problème de la drogue s'est développé à chaque fois que le MSM s'est retrouvé au pouvoir. Personne n'oubliera les ravages du *Brown Sugar*, introduit en 1983, d'abord distribué gratuitement pour causer la perte de la jeunesse. Puis, les drogues de synthèses ont explosé sous le dernier régime, encore une fois avec le MSM au pouvoir. Il y a eu d'autres dérives comme la vente des topettes d'alcool en petits sachets, jusqu'à qu'un étudiant en meurt. Mais, qu'ont fait les Jugnauth ? Absolument rien, si ce n'est que de soutirer toute cette mafia, que ce soit en 1983, ou encore durant les dix dernières années où ils étaient au pouvoir. Ils ont cru pouvoir se cacher derrière le rapport Lam Shang Leen pour laisser la situation se détériorer et s'empirer.

C'est pourquoi aujourd'hui je me tiens dans cette Assemblée. Je salue le courage et la volonté politique du Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam de venir avec *The National Agency for Drug Control Bill*. Cette législation traduit l'engagement et la volonté du Premier ministre et du gouvernement pour tenter d'éradiquer ce fléau. Et pour donner l'exemple, l'honorable Premier ministre et l'honorable *Deputy Prime Minister* joueront un rôle clef au sein de la commission à venir, mais la drogue est un problème à la fois sociétal et clinique. L'addiction aux drogues illicites est une maladie et la personne addictive est une personne malade qui doit bénéficier de tous les soins nécessaires.

Durant les années, le déficit majeur de notre politique en matière de lutte contre la consommation de la drogue a été l'extrême faiblesse des actions de prévention. C'est le fond du problème, ensuite c'est le regard de la société, le rejet d'individus pris dans le piège des marchands de la mort. Ceux-là à qui on fait croire qu'ils n'ont pas de place dans la société, dans leur famille, ou encore dans le monde du travail ; privé ou public. La drogue, mes chers collègues, ne choisit pas une communauté, une circonscription ou une classe sociale. Petits ou grands, riches ou pauvres, elle foudroie tout sur son passage. C'est pourquoi je souhaite bonne chance à la nouvelle agence car on ne veut plus voir les dégâts que la drogue cause chaque jour mais c'est un problème multidimensionnel et on ne pourra pas se reposer sur nos lauriers, attendant les résultats sans que chaque Mauricien et Mauricienne n'y apporte sa contribution.

Certaines nations ont opté pour la législation du cannabis. Notamment, force est de constater que le bilan global est plutôt mitigé. Dans certains pays, on entend dire que la consommation est en baisse, dans d'autres au contraire, on constate des dégâts sur le plan clinique qui sont beaucoup plus considérables qu'avant la législation ne s'est produite. La question n'a donc pas de réponse simple, malheureusement, mais il apparaît clairement que l'élément clef est bien évidemment la prévention.

Certains pays, notamment du nord de l'Europe, peuvent se targuer des résultats plutôt positifs. Je pense notamment à la Suède et à la Norvège, où la prévention commence généralement dès l'école primaire. Les élèves ont droit à plusieurs heures de formation dans le cadre des programmes hebdomadaires visant à développer leurs compétences psychosociales pendant toute l'année scolaire. Dans ces conditions, il est plutôt normal d'assister à des résultats conséquents, Madame la présidente. Il apparaît évident également que la répression seule ne fonctionne pas ; tout le monde est aujourd'hui convaincu. L'ancien président Barack Obama l'a dit. C'est pourquoi j'estime que l'exemple suisse se doit être cité. Il fonctionne sur la base de quatre piliers essentiels. D'abord la prévention, la prise en charge qui est la thérapie, ensuite la réduction des risques, et la répression enfin.

C'est un modèle efficace quand il est bien mené, qui a fait ses preuves face à tout type de drogues. L'état de droit doit ramener le crime sous le seuil de l'insupportable. Il faut adopter une politique de zéro tolérance, comme nous allons le faire à l'égard des barons de la drogue, tout en soignant leurs victimes. Malheureusement, durant des années, un laissez-faire a laissé beaucoup de tords à une génération. On ne doit pas laisser passer sous silence ce qui

se passe dans nos prisons, où des condamnés s'adonnent aux trafics de drogues depuis leurs cellules, car ils n'ont plus rien à espérer ou à perdre avec notre *sentencing policy*.

Pour en finir, l'honorable Roonky avait affirmé la semaine dernière –

*“Catastrophe is knocking at our doors.”*

*I am not afraid to say that this did not start* le 11 novembre 2024. J'ajouterai que c'est ce jour que la population nous a confié son espoir pour éradiquer ce fléau. Je souhaite à Sam Lauthan et à son équipe de nous guider dans cette tâche ardue au sein de la nouvelle agence, de proposer des politiques en phase avec la réalité du terrain, de rester réceptif comme il l'a toujours fait afin qu'ensemble, on trouve la lumière au bout du tunnel dans le combat contre la drogue.

Que Dieu nous aide à accomplir notre mission. Merci.

**Madam Speaker:** Merci d'avoir respecté le temps surtout.

Third Member for Grand River North West and Port Louis West, hon. Kugan Parapen!

(2.28 p.m.)

**The Junior Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mr K. Parapen):** Madame la présidente, le temps qui m'est alloué pour intervenir sur ce projet de loi important étant assez limité, permettez-moi d'aller directement dans le vif du sujet.

La guerre contre la drogue a été un échec total et retentissant. Ces paroles ne sont pas les miennes, mais celles de Volker Türk, le Haut-Commissaire des Droits Humains des Nations Unies. Ces paroles, il les a prononcées en décembre 2024, quelques jours à peine après la victoire retentissante de l'Alliance du Changement aux élections générales à l'île Maurice.

Oui, Madame la présidente, la guerre contre la drogue a été un échec total et retentissant. Le Haut-Commissaire des Nations Unies a ensuite fait un plaidoyer pour une réforme radicale de la politique globale concernant les drogues, en mettant l'accent sur le fait que des décennies de stratégies répressives et punitives ont détruit d'innombrables vies et ont endommagé des communautés entières. Il a de ce pas fait un appel urgent pour qu'il y ait un changement de cap vers une politique basée sur des données factuelles et centrée surtout autour des droits humains, mettant la santé publique, la dignité humaine et l'inclusion à l'avant plan.

Dans un monde parfait, il n'y aurait pas d'usagers de drogues. Tout le monde serait heureux et l'accès aux drogues serait inexistant. Seulement, la réalité est toute autre. On ne vit pas dans un monde parfait à coup sûr. C'est dans ce contexte que nous devons, en tant que législateurs de la société mauricienne, décider de l'approche à adopter en matière de politique de drogues.

En écoutant les interventions de certains de mes collègues sur ce projet de loi, j'ai, malheureusement, l'impression que l'émotionnel a pris le dessus sur le rationnel. Déclarer la guerre totale aux trafiquants de narcotiques est a priori l'option la plus logique. Éliminons l'offre et le problème sera résolu !

Madame la présidente, le chemin de l'enfer est pavé de bonnes intentions et il ne faudrait pas que le chemin de l'enfer de la drogue soit pavé des bonnes intentions de ce gouvernement. Je comprends tout à fait la volonté de certains, voire d'une majorité, de promouvoir une approche répressive et brutale. On veut tous protéger nos enfants après tout. Mais que faire quand cette approche a souvent été un lamentable échec à travers le monde ?

Un rapport du *National Drug Secretariat* datant de 2021 estime la population d'usagers de drogues à Maurice autour de 55 000 personnes, soit 7,4 % des personnes âgées entre 18 et 60 ans. Ce chiffre est probablement plus proche des 10 % dans la réalité, soit un Mauricien sur dix parmi la population active. Ce qui constitue un marché économique extrêmement lucratif.

La réalité économique est telle que tant qu'il y aura de la demande, l'offre suivra. Ne serait-il pas, donc, naïf de penser que le simple fait de traquer les trafiquants actuels fera disparaître les substances illicites ? Peut-on réalistiquement empêcher la drogue d'entrer dans le pays compte tenu du fait qu'on habite sur une île ? C'est pour cela que je privilégie l'aspect lié à la réduction de la demande de ce projet de loi. Il me semble plus logique de s'atteler à réduire la demande, car l'offre ne peut survivre en l'absence de demande.

À ce stade, je trouve opportun de faire une incursion dans la valeur marchande du trafic de drogues dans le pays. La valeur marchande des saisies de l'ADSU entre 2018 et 2022, toujours selon le *National Drug Secretariat*, se situait à R 11 milliards. Oui, Madame la présidente, R 11 milliards ! Et là, on ne parle que de ce qui a été saisi. Quand on sait que la drogue se vendait à peu près librement sous le précédent régime, on peut facilement déduire

que la valeur marchande annuelle du trafic de drogues dans notre République dépasse facilement les R 10 milliards annuellement, si ce n'est 15 milliards !

Et quand on considère le prix de revente des substances narcotiques, on comprend facilement que le trafic de drogues est la vraie poule aux œufs d'or de l'économie mauricienne. Plusieurs articles de presse font état de la vente du gramme de cannabis, aussi connu comme le *gandia*, dans une fourchette variant de R 3000 à R 4 000, alors que le prix pratiqué dans d'autres pays avoisine à peine les R 500 par gramme. Au final, le consommateur de drogue subit aussi un appauvrissement économique conséquent par rapport à son addiction.

Madame la présidente, il est extrêmement important de comprendre les dynamiques qu'entraîne le prix de marché de certaines drogues par rapport aux tendances liées à la consommation de produits illicites. Au vu de la flambée du prix du cannabis sur le marché local ces dernières années, ils sont nombreux, surtout ceux avec des moyens financiers limités, à avoir recherché un produit de substitution. Et ce produit, il se nomme la drogue synthétique. Cette drogue de synthèse, à base de produits extrêmement nocifs pour la santé, certains parlent même de poison pour rats, est en train de zombifier notre jeunesse.

Ma circonscription, ainsi que toute la région de Port Louis, sont sévèrement affectées, particulièrement les quartiers dits populaires. Alors que le cannabis est considéré par tous les experts comme étant moins dangereux que des substances comme l'héroïne, la cocaïne, l'alcool et la cigarette, les drogues de synthèse sont mortelles. Ce sont des poisons.

Il y a, malheureusement, un flou en ce qui concerne le taux de mortalité lié à l'usage de drogue dans notre société. Mais ce qui est certain, c'est que le nombre de jeunes ayant succombé au tristement célèbre œdème pulmonaire est en hausse drastique depuis l'apparition des drogues de synthèse. Ils sont des dizaines, voire des centaines de Mauriciens à avoir perdu la vie après avoir consommé des drogues de synthèse. Madame la présidente, il y a une urgence nationale par rapport à la prolifération des drogues synthétiques. Il nous faut agir et agir rapidement et de façon décisive.

Madame la présidente, l'espoir de ce projet de loi réside en la création de la *National Drug Control Commission*. Une instance dans laquelle siègera 16 ministres, sous la présidence du Premier ministre et du *Deputy Prime Minister*. Et c'est aux membres de la *National Drug Control Commission* que je m'adresse pour conclure mon intervention. Au vu



de la situation alarmante dans le pays, surtout concernant la prolifération des drogues synthétiques, je leur demande de considérer la politique du moindre mal, c'est-à-dire le principe qui aide à prendre des décisions éthiques dans des situations moralement difficiles. Au nom de la réduction des risques au niveau national, je leur demande sérieusement de considérer un assouplissement de la position gouvernementale vis-à-vis du cannabis allant même jusqu'à sa légalisation. Et cela, pour sauver notre jeunesse.

L'alcool et la cigarette, deux drogues plus dangereuses que le cannabis pour la société, se vendent déjà librement et rapportent beaucoup, beaucoup d'argent aux caisses de l'État. Une bonne dizaine de milliards de roupies annuellement. Une légalisation du cannabis permettrait non seulement au gouvernement de prélever une taxe conséquente, mais bénéficierait aussi grandement à la société. Premièrement, l'appauvrissement systématique des usagers de drogues au profit d'une poignée de trafiquants serait grandement ralenti. Et, deuxièmement, peut-être le plus important, la situation chaotique, surtout dans les quartiers populaires où règnent en maître les trafiquants et leurs acolytes, devrait connaître une amélioration notable.

Pour véritablement combattre le fléau de la drogue, il faudrait s'y prendre bien en amont. La raison principale pour laquelle des personnes se droguent et développent une addiction est la recherche d'une échappatoire. Échapper à quoi? Échapper à des traumatismes de l'enfance ou de l'adolescence, que ce soit des abus physiques, verbaux ou sexuels ou même encore le fait d'avoir évolué dans un environnement familial toxique. Les recherches démontrent clairement qu'un adolescent victime de traumatismes pendant l'enfance est trois fois plus à risque de développer une addiction. Plus de sept enfants sur dix qui ont essayé une substance illicite avant l'âge de 13 ans ont développé une addiction. Voilà de quoi faire réfléchir la *National Drug Control Commission* sur les axes prioritaires en matière de politiques de prévention.

En économie, on parle souvent de la politique de *tax the parent, support the child*. Une approche semblable devrait être considérée en matière de politique de drogues à Maurice. C'est littéralement une question de vie ou de mort. Et j'espère que les membres de cette commission en ont pleinement conscience.

Merci, Madame la présidente.

**Madam Speaker:** Je vous remercie.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Third for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central, Dr. Aumeer!

(2.40 p.m.)

**Dr. F. Aumeer (Third Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This Bill could not have come at a better time particularly when we are witnessing the changing landscape of drug consumption in the country at large.

Madam Speaker, this Bill has been comprehensively enacted as it entails virtually all the aspects of drug prevention and drug control, looking into what we call the rehabilitation, substitution therapy and reinsertion in the community. However, there are still a lot of questions that are being asked about the dispensing of methadone in certain areas. I would urge the Commission, the NADC to look into, for those who are stable, whether home dispensing of methadone should be a reality for some, irrespective whether other drugs such as buprenorphine can be used.

We have also seen that this Bill has entailed and mentioned the collateral consequences of drug consumption in the field of medicine, particularly in HIV/ AIDS, hepatitis. I would ask and request the mover of the Bill to also consider having as an entity a special vascular unit that will look at all drug users who have been using intravenous drugs and have had their veins blown off or destroyed likewise, we see them with heavy bandages on the right, left arms or feet.

Madam Speaker, the choice of the hon. Prime Minister at the Head of the Commission together with the hon. Deputy Prime Minister highlights the seriousness with which the Government is approaching the drug issue control; it brings political authority. Notwithstanding, the inclusion of the Attorney General is an important step as drug policy entails legal and constitutional issues as well as our drug policies need to comply with legal frameworks and human right standards.

Madam Speaker, everybody in this House must have been horrified and dismayed that the sight of seeing individuals who have been consuming synthetic drugs, semi-arched on their motorbikes, flexed on the road, cannot stand on their feet, scrambled to get from the roads and sometimes looking oblivious to what is going on around them. Such is the powerful effect of the neurotoxin of the drugs that are present, that these people can no longer have any

idea where they are. The black mamba and all are the past, new craze: paper synthetic drugs, *lapay* and now we are seeing videos of students going to school using a much new method: huffing, taking and sniffing from bottles. This will have to stop. I am sure the NADC will be looking at that.

Madam Speaker, as the Bill clearly mentioned, the collaboration of the Forensic Department together with international agencies is obviously important to increase the precision of tracking and identification of drugs. However, drug lords and drug barons are always a step ahead because they have under their hand a new explosive cocktail that have severe, immediate, neurotoxic effect that will make it more appealing to the drug consumers. It is extremely very complicated to have advance knowledge of the pharmacokinetics and the pharmacodynamics capacities of these new toxic drugs. I strongly recommend that benzene, acetone, methanol, or those that are being used as solvent, be classified substances and rigorously controlled. Therefore, if Forensic Department will always be a step backward due to the imagination of drug traffickers and drug barons, we have to look at the social determinants of drug control and this is what, Madam Speaker, brings me to the chain of transmission of drugs in the country.

Drug barons and drug lords survive only because they have intermediaries that work for them to dispense their lethal products to those who are hooked on taking drugs. Who have not seen the slanky, *aux allures louches* of individuals sitting on the streets, crouched on their knees and hoping to get their next victim and get them to buy drugs? These people are the ones that are the intermediates, who are what I call these drug barons and their CEOs, if I can make it that way.

Who has not been to a visit to Riche Terre Cemetery, Bois Marchand Cemetery, lined along completely houses after houses, these intermediate *jockeys* as we call them, *les jockeys*, and recently, five days ago, there is a new trend, we have moto-jockey, they are the ones who come, pick you, take you to the drug den and buy it and there was quite a fight, if I can call it in my constituency only a few days ago. We have to act, the NADC will need to act with full decisive and deterring manner using the full force of the law to keep our streets clean. Our streets have to be kept clean. I am talking about the capital, the city where I have grown up, where I became a Member of the Assembly. The street must become clean, we need to instill the fear factor in them. Likewise, simple example, Donald Trump wanted those who did not have a passport or a permit to stay in this country to get out and he targeted Chicago, do you

know what happened? At five o'clock, Chicago is clean; no cars, no parties, no people on the street, the fear factor was instilled.

*Madam Speaker*, ces mini-laboratoires de drogues synthétiques ou succursales de vente comme je les appelle, où j'ai grandi dans la capitale, font pignon sur rue. Même tous les jeunes de certains quartiers qui vont acheter des friandises dans la boutique du coin peuvent vous dire exactement où se vend la drogue, où se vendent les drogues synthétiques. Mais pourquoi ? Et pourquoi jusqu'à maintenant ces marchands de la mort ont pu continuer de plus belle ? La volonté de l'ancien gouvernement n'était pas là et certaines brebis galeuses de la force policière étaient de mèche, trop occupés à frotter du gel pendant ces dix dernières années. L'ancien gouvernement nous a dit *ad nauseam* : *mo pou kas lerin trafikan ladrog*. Mais qu'est-ce qui s'est passé ? *Zot fin kares trafikan ladrog*. Mais nous, on les a vu dans tous ses sens. Les Franklins, les frères Gurroby, les Dewdane et ses bonbonnes, la tractopelle au dessinateur inconnu et ces balades en mer avec ces députés en bel loisir. Pendant dix ans, l'histoire s'est répétée comme avec le même gouvernement MSM que s'est répété les Amsterdam boys.

*Madam Speaker*, *pas plus tard que cinq jours de cela, il y a eu un rapport que l'île Maurice et Air Mauritius* have been identified as being in the limelight for the traffick of drugs. I have the paper; I can share it with anybody. I am sure many of you have it. And talking about ghost suitcases. Who has been bringing ghost suitcases in this country? This has started from the previous government and the NADC should look under its umbrella, as any authority, the narcotics and UNODC to make sure that this should stop.

*Madam Speaker*, en tant que député et candidat aux élections de novembre 2024, le combat contre la drogue était de façon régulière et ces avocats qui étaient candidats, je me faisais un devoir de les dénoncer, qui ont été mentionnés dans le rapport Lam Shang Leen, quitte à m'attirer les foudres de leurs partisans. Pourquoi l'ai-je fait ? Parce que semaine après semaine, j'ai assisté à des funérailles où les pères de familles enterrent leurs jeunes de moins de 30 ans. Ce n'est pas facile de voir un papa porter le cercueil de son enfant, aller au cimetière seulement à cause de l'hécatombe de la drogue. Mais ma plus grande satisfaction a été le jour du dépouillement quand dans les salles de décompte, j'étais très content sur les votes ; je n'ai reçu aucun vote des sympathisants du MSM, quitte à sortir troisième dans la circonscription. Je répète aucun vote de sympathie du MSM quitte à sortir troisième.

Madam Speaker, the Lam Shang Leen Report has described our sea courses as porous. I wish to highlight that in the chain of transmission of drugs, we have a few black sheep skippers. The skippers play a major role in the business of drug trafficking. The skippers and those who obtain pleasure craft licenses, be it outside lagoon, inside lagoon, come from the Mauritius Tourism Authority and the Mauritius Tourism Authority from the Ministry should have a stringently controlled system.

*Madam Speaker*, je voudrais parler rapidement, permettez-moi de faire une incursion dans ce fameux jargon des barons de la drogue quand le MSM était au pouvoir : *gouvernman dan nou lame*. Si je termine là-dessus, je n'ai pas complété mon discours, c'est juste la malchance mais il faut que tout le monde le sache. Je l'ai vécu personnellement ce qu'on appelle *gouvernman dan nou lame*.

Un vendredi soir, quelqu'un qui faisait son travail comme portier au Cinéma Rex, en empêchant les barons de la drogue d'y pénétrer et avoir une altercation et il y a eu une mêlée. Le lendemain, c'était la vengeance. On l'a poignardé au su et au vu de tout le monde devant le marché central et le corps de cet homme, bien bâti, est retourné chez lui, enveloppé dans son linge sale, recouvert et tâché de sang. Ce jeune homme n'était autre que mon voisin, le locataire de mon père. Il avait comme épouse une Réunionnaise avec un enfant qui avait des difficultés neurologiques. C'était un drame !

Et, ces marchands de la mort, devaient trois jours plus tard, dans une voiture, *Nissan Sunny* jaune pâle, je pourrais même donner le numéro ici. Je l'ai vécu, je l'ai vu, assis sur le toit de sa voiture, il chantait à tue-tête, ' *gouvernman dan nou lamin*'. Ces caïques de la drogue étaient soutenus par le gouvernement d'alors. C'est pourquoi aujourd'hui vous me voyez venir devant vous, parler avec tant de conviction. On ne devrait jamais revoir cela.

Et avant de terminer, une seule chose – pourquoi le *control deliveries* de drogue n'aboutissent pas dans plusieurs cas ? Et la dernière fois, on avait même une *Policewoman Officer* qui a été, malheureusement, tuée dans le sud de l'île. Il va falloir que la National Agency for Drug Control voit tout cela de très près.

J'en ai beaucoup à dire mais je dirais quelque chose pour terminer.

*Le NADC* has an immense job to do; a very big job. I wish good luck to Dr. Sulliman and Mr Lauthan whom I have known very well. Dr. Suleiman has been a colleague of mine and I have seen his dedication in the prevention of drugs. And, I congratulate the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister for having brought such an important Bill to the

House as a tangible proof of our electoral pledges within the initial six months of government.

Good luck to you all. Thank you!

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you, Dr. Aumeer!

Hon. Third Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil!

(2.52 p.m.)

**Mr C. Ramkalawon (Third Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil):** Madam Speaker, I rise today to express my whole-hearted support for the National Agency for Drug Control Bill. The NADC, a Bill that in my humble view, represents not just a legislative step forward but a necessary moral reckoning.

For years, we, in this House, have heard and at times, perhaps too easily forgotten the stories that have emerged from the underbelly of our society. Stories of young lives cut short, of parents waking up every day to the grief of having buried a child not because of accident or a disease but due to the steady and silent poison, that is, drug addiction.

Hon. Members, we cannot pretend not to have seen those tragedies. We cannot pretend that they happened in the shadows. These are stories that played out in every corner of our Republic; in our cities and towns, in our villages, and yes, even in every constituencies we are privileged to represent. For every name we remember, there are countless others we do not, yet each of them was someone's son, someone's daughter, someone's world. And all the while, the cries of parents, siblings and entire communities echoed unanswered. Their voices, their sufferings; they must never fall on deaf ears again.

Madam Speaker, one of the objectives of this Bill is to allow the coordination and monitoring of the treatment and rehabilitation of persons who use drugs and their social integration. Today, one of the biggest challenges in this war against illicit drugs is the shift of focus which was seemed to be exclusively on repression to a balanced approach of aspects of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and relapse prevention.

The House will remember that the previous government led by the MSM Party had closed down the NATReSA in 2016. NATReSA had as objectives –

1. To coordinate and facilitate efforts at national level towards the implementation of programmes for the prevention of substance abuse and the treatment and rehabilitation of substance abusers;

2. To mobilise resources, locally and internationally, for treatment and rehabilitation of substance abusers, and
3. To advise, guide and help voluntarily social organisations, engaged in the prevention of substance abuse and in the treatment and rehabilitation of substance abusers.

However, since the dissolution of the NATReSA, and at no time, neither had the previous government enforced the law to concentrate on the prevention aspect to channel victims to appropriate rehabilitation centre nor has the previous government set up an appropriate programme to emphasise on the social re-integration of illicit drug users, which is why the need for this Bill to be passed and supported.

The war against illicit drugs requires a scientific and step-by-step approach as rightly recommended by the Commission of Enquiry on Drug Trafficking Report. It is important that we also focus on the psycho-social, cultural and contextual factors that are pushing the youngsters to the initiation with drugs of which the continued use is leading to abuse and dependence. This is why the creation of the NADC is not merely important; it is urgent, it is essential and is long overdue. This new institution will be far more than a rebranding exercise. It is envisioned as the central empowered body to oversee, coordinate and execute a National Drug Control Strategy with truth, empathy and with clarity of purpose. It will address both sides of the crisis.

On one hand, the demand for drugs through structured prevention campaigns, rehabilitation services and meaningful social integration of those affected. On the other hand, the supply of drugs through coordinated efforts to disrupt trafficking, reduce availability and prosecute the network that profit from the miseries. Importantly, the Bill recognises that harm reduction must be part of our approach; we can no longer accept a 'one size fits all' punitive model. We must, instead, support those battling addiction as persons in need of help not just punishment.

This includes reducing the transmission of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C, which disproportionately, affect persons who use drugs. The NADC will be backed by a well-defined administrative structure comprising several divisions including policy and strategy rehabilitation, public awareness and prevention. This institutional architecture is designed to ensure not just operational efficiency but a holistic and human-centred response to drug abuse.

And, let us not overlook the most crucial element – the creation of the National Drug Control Commission to be chaired by the hon. Prime Minister himself. This will ensure direct oversight and high-level policy alignment as well as synergy across all relevant ministries. It demonstrates political will at the highest level; a clear message that the government will no longer tolerate fragmented or half-hearted approaches.

Madam Speaker, this Bill is a turning point; it is our opportunity as legislators and representatives of the people to finally say – “we have heard you” to the mother who lost her son, to the father whose daughter vanished into the cracks of a broken system, to the child who no longer remembers what a safe home feels like.

How can I forget the episode at Fond du Sac some years back? I have as witness my friend, hon. Dr. Gungapersad and hon. Beehook, where a grandmother rushed towards us with tears in her eyes. I quote –

*“Hamar nati hamar microwave 200 roupia mein bech delag ladrog kateen.”* [which means my grandson sold my microwave for Rs200 just to buy drugs!]

It is a declaration that we, as a nation, are prepared to confront the drug crisis, not only with a force of law, but with a force of compassion, planning and unity.

Let us not delay or dilute what is necessary. Let us rise to the occasion and enact this legislation with the seriousness it deserves. As an educator of Sociology, this direction is of utmost importance. The whole process from initiation to psychological and psychophysical dependence has to be properly understood and explained in schools, colleges and to all other stakeholders.

We need to encourage the whole Mauritian community to mobilise against drug trafficking, use and abuse, impact on the mindset change, provide efficient resources to the authorities, and more so, work alongside sociocultural organisations whose contribution is essential in reaching out to all citizens of the country.

Today, Madam Speaker, the drug situation is very alarming in schools and colleges. For this, we need to act fast and in a very efficient manner. Therefore, we need to address issues, such as inadequacy of sensitisation programmes, lack of mechanisms in identifying vulnerable students and lack of specialised mechanisms consisting of experts who can contribute in psychosocial aspect. *L’encadrement* of those youngsters has to be considered as the Commission of Enquiry on Drug Trafficking Report 2018 highlighted.



The drug issue was being undermined and not taken seriously as warranted by authorities. Thus, concerned stakeholders did not assume their role as to drug issues in schools and colleges.

Effective treatment approaches, accompanied by well-structured psychosocial support services, with a clearly defined roles and responsibilities of all personnel involved, has to be considered under this Bill. During the electoral campaign, this alliance, on the Government side, had voiced out massively against the use of illicit drugs. Today, under the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, we are proud that we are taking the initiative to enact appropriate laws to address the problem of illicit drugs.

It is important that all stakeholders, including concerned Ministries, Customs, Police, Non-Governmental Organisations act together to consolidate the activities to fight against drugs, and more so, the rehabilitation process.

I will quote a famous Indian philosopher –

*“Jiss umr mein javanon ko mohabat ka nasha karna chahiye, uss umr mein voh nashe ke mohabat mein hain.”* [which means at the golden age of being intoxicated in love, the youth of today is in love of being intoxicated to drugs!]

Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** It is alright, he translated it! We are being nice!

The next person is the hon. Third Member for Rodrigues, Mrs Henriette-Manan!

(3.04 p.m.)

**Mrs D. Henriette-Manan (Third Member for Rodrigues):** Madam Speaker, my speech will not be a long one. But I could not stay silent on such a Bill relating to drugs as my speech does not entail only my voice. It echoes the voice of my people who live in the fear of Rodrigues becoming a haven for drug traffickers and whose hearts are heavy with worry as our youth stand vulnerable to the devastating grip of synthetic drugs.

Albert Einstein said –

“The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything.”

Today, we stand at a critical juncture faced with a reality we can no longer ignore. The fight against drugs is not just another agenda item. It is and must remain one of the most

urgent and vital mission of this Government. This Bill marks a crucial first step in the fight against drug proliferation, paving the way for other legislation on drugs to follow.

The drug situation in Rodrigues is dire. As Rodrigues forms an integral part of our republic, it must not and cannot be spared from the same level of attention and action. If anything, Rodrigues, given its size, isolation and social vulnerabilities, demands even greater vigilance. The statistics from the Anti-Drugs and Smuggling Unit in Rodrigues provide a snapshot. Though, perhaps, only a partial one of what we are up against. In 2023, 101 individuals were arrested in connection with drug related cases. Among them, just one juvenile.

This number dropped to 40 in 2024. A positive sign maybe, but we must look deeper. These arrests were primarily linked to cannabis. Cases involved the uprooting of plants, possession of seeds, smoking cases and smoking apparatus. There were no reported cases involving hard drugs, and just two cases in 2023 related to psychotropic pills. On paper, these numbers may seem very modest compared to mainland Mauritius. But reality, as echoed by NGOs, hospital workers and youth officers on the ground may be far more troubling.

We must acknowledge a crucial limitation. Rodrigues currently lacks the facilities and tools to detect hard drug consumption or synthetic drug influence. This is not a luxury; it is a necessity. We cannot allow ourselves to be lured into a false sense of security. We cannot wait for a crisis to erupt before we act. As of now, Rodrigues has no adequate treatment and rehabilitation centre. But there are works being done by the Commissioner of Health with the means available, of course. But we need more help. This is why Rodrigues also welcomes this Bill because we must be prepared, Madam Speaker. What happens if the numbers we see are just the tip of the iceberg?

That said, we commend the initiatives already taken by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. A High-Powered Committee, under the aegis of the Chief Commissioner's Office, is actively working on sensitisation and prevention. The Commissioner for Youth in collaboration with CRAC, ADSU, the Commissioner of Health and Rodrigues Council of Social Services has mobilised to deliver awareness campaigns throughout the island. A peer-to-peer approach is now being used. Ten youth council members have been trained, since 2023, to engage with their peers in schools, villages and youth centres.

I must take the opportunity to express my heartfelt congratulations to all those working tirelessly in Rodrigues to combat the proliferation of drugs, especially the dedicated Police

Force and committed youth officers whose unwavering efforts are making a meaningful difference across the island.

Madam Speaker, prevention efforts are underway, but prevention alone cannot seal all cracks. We need strong preventative measures, but we also need systemic support. We need to integrate Rodrigues into the broader anti-drug framework being implemented in Mauritius. The National Agency for Drug Control Bill is, therefore, a welcomed development.

It represents a national commitment to combating this menace. We are pleased to see that Rodrigues is not overlooked in the Bill. It was initially mentioned that the Chief Commissioner of Rodrigues may only upon request by the Prime Minister attend an NADC meetings.

We thank the hon. Prime Minister for having listened to our request and has amended this. The Chief Commissioner now has a full seat on the NADC. We believe that Rodrigues need this full seat and equal voice granted so that Rodrigues can actively contribute to and benefit from the National Strategy. We also welcome the Bill's provision for drug use prevention education to be implemented in schools, a much-needed move, especially in Rodrigues where our children are in a highly vulnerable. *Mais, ne voilons pas la face*. Let us not pretend the threat will be easy tackled. Drug abuse will escalate even more if we do not act decisively. We cannot afford to beat around the bush for fear of opening a so-called "Pandora's box". Most of us will say that the box is already opened. Are we delaying actions because we fear confronting the very forces that may be feeding this crisis? Do we dare to ask the hard questions? Isn't it time to rethink the legal status of cannabis.

The decriminalisation of cannabis is increasingly supported by scientific research highlighting its medical benefits especially how it effectively alleviates symptoms in conditions like chronic pain, epilepsy and anxiety. Given these findings, many argue that maintaining the criminal status of cannabis ignores its potential as a safer therapeutic alternative. But this shall be another the debate that I humbly ask the NADC to address as urgent. I am sure this Bill is a precursor to the one that our nation really seeks. Madam Speaker, the time for reflection is over, the time for action is now. We must ensure that Rodrigues remains a land of hope and we must give Mauritius its time of salvation.

This Bill is a step in the right direction but it must be backed by equal commitment, resources and representation. Let not our fear fail our children, let not inaction fail our future. With these words I commend this Bill, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I would appreciate if the Deputy Speaker could take the Chair.

*At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Please be seated. Hon. Prayag! You have the floor.

(3.15 p.m.)

**Dr. S. Prayag (First Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart):** Mr Deputy Speaker, it is with a deep sense of duty, hope and of unwavering commitment that I rise to address this esteemed House on the National Agency for Drug Control Bill (No. VI of 2025). As a practising medical doctor, with years of experience in social service, I stand here not just as a parliamentarian but as someone who has witnessed first-hand devastating impact of addiction on individuals, families and communities.

Today, we are having a legislative framework that reflects our collective resolve to confront the scourge of drugs that has plagued our nation for far too long. I begin by commending, our hon. Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister for their visionary leadership and urgency in bringing forward this meticulously crafted Bill. Their dedication to addressing this pressing issue head-on is a testament to their commitment for the well-being of our nation.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, recent surveys paint a sobering picture of the drug epidemic in Mauritius. It is estimated that nearly 29% drug users in Mauritius fall between the ages of 18 to 24. It is on our streets; it is in our schools and even in our homes. This Bill needs to be addressed with compassion, clarity and a commitment to safeguard the future of our youth. The success of this Bill depends on us, on our collaboration and our determination to make it work. It demands that we rise above partisan divides and work together for the greater good of Mauritius.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the drug problem is not just about substances. In addition to stolen youth and shattered families, it is also about the overburdened health care systems and rising crime. It is about the invisible chains that bind individuals in the cruel cycle of addiction and exclusion. This national emergency demands decisive actions, strategic coordination and a robust institutional response.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, being a healthcare professional, I will only speak briefly about two important aspects today: demand reduction and harm reduction. I wish to emphasise the

importance of demand reduction. Substance use disorder are well documented pathologies requiring proper diagnosis and treatment according to the latest editions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, edition 5, and the International Classification of Diseases, edition 11. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, addiction is not a moral failing or a lack of willpower. It is a chronic brain disease. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse of the United States of America, addiction is defined as a chronic relapsing disorder. It is characterised by compulsive drug seeking and use despite adverse consequences. The term chronic meaning persisting and constantly recurring is crucial here. This understanding has profound implications on how we approach treatment and policy-making. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is time we recognise that individuals struggling with addiction are patients in need of care. It is time we move beyond punitive measures. Just as we managed chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension with long-term care and support, addiction demands sustained evidence-based interventions. It requires medically assisted treatments, harm reduction strategies and comprehensive rehabilitation programmes including cognitive behavioural therapy.

This Bill provides us with an opportunity to establish specialised universally accessible departments and rehabilitation centres staffed by experts in addiction medicine, psychiatrists, psychologists, specialised nurses and other healthcare professionals. The Ministry of Health and Wellness will have a crucial role in addressing this dormant situation aggravated during the previous 10 years.

In this regard I invite the fellow members of the House to refer to the “Rat Park” study conducted by the Canadian psychologist, Bruce K. Alexander in the late 70s. This study challenged the prevailing notion that addiction is solely driven by the pharmacological effects of drugs. Instead, it highlighted the critical role of environmental and social factors in addiction. It reminded us that social connection between mental stimulation and overall well-being are essential in reducing addictive behaviours. Our Ministries of Youth and Sports, Arts and Culture, Gender, Environment, Local Government will definitely create more opportunities and facilities for our youth to turn away from drugs. In brief, all the stakeholders, that is, the ministries that are mentioned in the Bill have a special role in supporting this legislation together with the Attorney General’s Office, NGOs, the Police Force and even the Chief Commissioner of Rodrigues.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, harm reduction is another critical pillar of this Bill. Methadone for instance, Methadone is the golden standard. It is often misunderstood by the laypersons.

Yet, it is a medically approved treatment for opioid use disorder worldwide, with both anti-withdrawal and anti-craving properties, that is, psychological dependence. The issue is not with the medicine itself but with its dispensing, a challenge that this Bill will address through a well-structured framework.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is imperative that this legislation works in close collaboration with the forensic science laboratory, as well as the Government Analysis Division to rectify a critical error that has persisted over the past decade; the error of misclassifying all new psychoactive substances that are commonly called *synthétique* under a single category. This approach has led to a one-size-fits-all treatment model which is neither scientifically sound nor clinically effective. Methadone must remain the gold standard for opioid use disorder but we must also recognise the importance of other medications such as Suboxone, Naltrexone and emerging new treatments like Lofexidine, Brixadi, Modafinil, and Nabilone.

Furthermore, it is crucial that we differentiate between drugs grouped as stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens, dissociative, empathogens, psychedelics and other classes. I urge my fellow hon. Members to refer to the drugs wheel to have an idea about what kind of drugs we have and what kind of treatment modalities we should adopt. This means that this legislation must put an end to the oversimplification of the previous Government and ensure that our strategies are as precise and diverse as the substances and conditions we aim to address.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to draw the attention of this House to the issue of rehabilitation facilities for young women and girls, a matter that requires both sensitivity and urgency. Would you believe that currently there is only one functioning female rehabilitation ward in Mauritius, in the entire country? Over the past decade, no separate centre was established to cater specifically to the needs of young women and girls under the age of 24, be it even those under the age of 18 who are in their formative years, who should have been closely monitored by the ombudsperson.

This has created an untenable situation where a young girl, eager to seek treatment and rehabilitation finds herself sharing the same space as older, more experienced individuals with severe addiction issues. While every individual deserves compassion and care, we must recognise that the needs and vulnerabilities of a young girl are vastly different from those of a mature adult. It is not just about providing treatment, it is about creating a safe, supportive

and age-appropriate environment that fosters healing and recovery without stigma. This is not just about stigmatisation. We are not stigmatising anyone but it is about tailoring our approach to meet the unique needs of every individual seeking help.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill emphasises the need for infrastructure and expertise. Many regions in Mauritius, including north-east, east, southern parts, lack proper facilities to address substance use disorders. We must ask ourselves whether a patient with addictive behaviour will travel hours, even change two or three buses to attend treatment induction on a daily basis or will he/she prefer to default? Why do only four of our six Methadone induction centres in Mauritius are still concentrated only in Port Louis and lower Plaine Wilhems till today? Has substance abuse only been an urban problem for the past ten years? We need dedicated hospitals and rehabilitation centres staffed by trained professionals. For example, the Dr. Bruno Cheong Hospital which currently lies closed, could be transformed into a fully functional rehabilitation centre.

Imagine the impact of having all the necessary experts under one roof, working together to tackle this issue. This is the kind of bold innovative thinking we need to make a real difference and I mention, hearing the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness expressing his noble intention in making it happen in the near future. In closing, I wish to address the biopsychosocial model, a well-established framework in medical and psychological practice. This model emphasises the need to address the biological, the psychological and the social factors that contribute to addiction. Only by understanding these interconnected dimensions can we hope to rehabilitate individuals effectively.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the NADC Bill is a landmark piece of legislation. It reflects our collective commitment to addressing the drug problem in Mauritius with intelligence, compassion and determination. It acknowledges the complexity of addiction, the importance of harm reduction and the need for comprehensive coordinated action. Let us not underestimate the challenges ahead. Let us not lose sight of the hope this Bill represents, together with unity and resolve, we can build a healthier, safer Mauritius for future generations. This Bill will not end drug abuse overnight but it will definitely begin something more powerful, a coordinated, intelligent and humane response that saves lives and futures.

Thank you.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you. Hon. Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac! Let me remind you that you have only ten minutes.

(3.27 p.m.)

**Mr R. Jhummun (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

I would like from the very outset inform this august Assembly that the National Agency for Drug Control Bill might be one of the most important Bills to be discussed during this mandate. There is a problem *qui ronge notre société*, a Problem with a capital ‘P’ which is slowly but surely devastating our society, it is the drug problem. I mean drug trafficking and drug addiction. *Si on reste les bras croisés à ne rien faire*, this social scourge may contribute to societal collapse.

Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill has the power of bringing a social change by changing the behavioural pattern of certain people, and in our fight against drug trafficking and drug dealing, this Bill may represent a game changer. As a father, as a citizen, as a politician, and now as a Member of this Government, we are dutybound to fight against this national problem. As the hon. Prime Minister said, it represents a national commitment.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will stick to this paradigm in dealing with this Bill, namely –

- Where are we now?
- Where we want to be, and
- How do we reach there?

Where are we now has been discussed lengthily by all my colleagues since last week. From their intervention supported by facts, figures and examples, I can rightly conclude that –

- (i) Never in the history of this country, so much drugs have entered the country in the last ten years.
- (ii) Never in the history of this country, there has been so many drug addicts in each and every corner of the country. *Personne n’est à l’abri*.

This is where are we now.

My second question: where we want to be. Of course, a drug-free Mauritius but this *paraît un peu trop prétentieux, trop même*. A very tall order, Mr Sam Lauthan but let me quote John Lennon who said in Imagine –



“You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will be as one.”

Let us come to the main course. How do we reach there?

In fact, this Bill is all about how do we reach there, that is, addressing drug use prevention and drug control issues in Mauritius. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the demand reduction of drugs calls for education, education and education. My dear friend, the hon. Minister of Education, will agree that we need to educate the students, we need to educate the parents and we need to educate our educators on how to tackle this problem.

Education and awareness are key in the demand reduction of drugs. We need, amongst others, age-appropriate drug education in our school curriculum –

- peer education programmes;
- emotional management;
- counselling and mental health services;
- parent education;
- training for teachers and schools' staff;
- mentorship programmes;
- influencers' partnership through social media, and
- media campaigns on positive lifestyle.

I believe in choice architecture, that is, the youngsters will have to know the dangers awaiting them to be able to nudge their behaviour. To make them think in the way we want.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in our fight to reduce the demand of drugs, we need, firstly, recreational and development programmes in terms of youth engagement programmes such as creativity, sports and arts. Our colleague, the hon. Minister of Youth and Sports, will have a daunting task. For instance, in my constituency, we have neither a gymnasium nor a stadium et *encore moins, une piscine*.

**Ms Anquetil:** *Bientôt!*

**Mr Jhummun:** Merci !

*Nous avons des terrains de foot qui sont dans un état déplorable et sans éclairage. Et, il y avait deux ministres ; un ministre des Finances et un de la Santé !* All this led to monotony and boredom and lack of occupation and leisure activities to the youngsters.

Secondly, we need community and public support in terms of –

- community drug watch and support groups;
- whistleblowers upon drug access to the community, particularly in the drug prone areas,
- religious organisations have a vital role. Together with NGOs, they can provide life skill training.

*M. le président, the drug addicts, les drogués, comme l'a si bien dit the Deputy Prime Minister, sont des victimes. Ce sont des personnes malades. Ils ont besoin de nous. Il faut les tendre la main.* We need to help them move from social exclusion to social integration. Even PILS will not be isolated, unlike what the hon. Leader of the Opposition said. Indeed, PILS will have an agency on which it can hold on to.

This Bill provides for the rehabilitation and social integration of people who use drugs. Rehabilitation programmes, in my humble opinion, can take the form of –

- residential rehabilitation programmes;
- adolescents specific rehab programmes;
- counselling and behavioural therapy,
- medication assisted treatment programme like the methadone.

*M. le président,* while I am for the provision of methadone, like my friend, hon. Dr. Prayag, yet, I believe that there is a pressing need to review the way it is being distributed. I urge that we move in that direction. We need to change our mindset towards the drug addicts to facilitate their re-introduction.

This Bill also empowers the National Agency for Drug Control to coordinate the supply reduction of drugs by preventing, reducing or disrupting the entry production and availability of drugs.

*M. le président,* the daily scene between the Police and the drug traffickers is like the fight between the tiger and the gazelle. The Police indeed represent the tiger and the drug traffickers the gazelle. The gazelle must outrun the fastest tiger or perish, while the tiger must

outrun the gazelle or starve. Unfortunately, in the Mauritian context, the gazelle, that is, the drug lords, wins. Fortunately, now, we have a lion to assess the tigers.

The best way to determine whether we are successful in preventing or disrupting the entry of drugs is to look at the street price synthetic drugs, which kept on falling over the last 10 years, synonymous to the failure of the previous government.

*M. le président*, together with stricter controls at all points of entry, whether by air or sea, I believe in the training of our Police Officers. All those involved in drug control must be provided with the right training and tools well in advance. They cannot be picked from any department of the Police and sent to the ADSU and expect them to deliver. It is too serious of an issue to allow for on-the-job-training. We have even seen some taking protection money.

With all due respect to our Police Officers, I would also humbly suggest that we seek foreign expertise. We cannot take chances. *L'heure est grave!* Doing more of the same with the same persons is less likely to generate different results.

*M. le président*, we can go on passing different Bills, subsequently laws, but we will all concur that more importantly, it is enforcement of the laws which is necessary. For example, there is prohibition of the sale of cigarettes to minors. Yet, we all know, in each and every corner, this is accessible to each and every one.

*M. le président*, we are told that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, but we are not told that it should be in the right direction. This Bill is indeed in the right direction.

To conclude, *M. le président*, there are three types of people: one who makes things happen; one who watches things happen; and a third one who asks what happened, like those who are absent today. I feel proud to belong to a Government, with our hon. Prime Minister and the team around him, who are people who believe that we can make things happen.

Thank you for your attention.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière!

(3.38 p.m.)

**The Junior Minister of Youth and Sports (Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha):** M. le président, je me tiens devant cette auguste Assemblée avec une conviction profonde : notre jeunesse mérite mieux que la peur, le silence ou la stigmatisation face aux fléaux de la drogue.

Notre jeunesse mérite mieux que d'être prise au piège, enchaînée par une dangereuse dépendance. Notre jeunesse mérite mieux que d'endurer échecs scolaires, isolations, endettements, troubles de santé physique et mentale, pertes d'emploi. Notre jeunesse mérite mieux que de voir leur avenir volé par les marchands de la mort.

Aujourd'hui, avec le *National Agency for Drug Control Bill*, nous posons les fondations d'une réponse nationale nouvelle, humaine et résolue. Cette agence, placée sous l'autorité directe du Premier ministre, incarnera notre volonté d'agir avec fermeté contre les trafiquants tout en tenant la main aux victimes.

Ce projet de loi crée enfin une architecture cohérente et moderne pour faire face à l'un des plus graves défis de notre époque, la prolifération de drogues dures, souvent trafiquées au cœur même de nos villes et de nos villages et l'irruption de substances synthétiques, qui échappent encore à bien des contrôles.

Avec la mise en place de cet agence nationale de contrôle des drogues, nous nous donnons les moyens non-seulement de mieux coordonner les enquêtes et les actions policières mais aussi, et c'est essentiel, d'orienter les efforts vers la prévention, l'éducation et l'accompagnement des jeunes.

Cette agence ne sera pas un outil de répression aveugle ; elle aura aussi vocation à fédérer les ONG, les éducateurs, les chercheurs, les familles et les jeunes, eux-mêmes, autour d'une stratégie fondée sur la réalité du terrain. Il est, par exemple, urgent de faire distinction entre le cannabis naturel qui fait l'objet de débats légitimes dans plusieurs juridictions à travers le monde et ses dérivés synthétiques qui eux tuent. Ces produits artificiels, souvent désignés par des noms anodins comme 'Spice' ou 'K2' et leurs effets sont imprévisibles : convulsions, attaque cardiaque, paranoïa aiguë et parfois même la mort. La nouvelle agence pourra enfin centraliser l'identification de ces substances, soutenir des campagnes ciblées d'information et réagir plus vite à leur diffusion sur notre territoire car sans information scientifique et différenciée, nos jeunes sont vulnérables aux pièges les plus dangereux.

M. le président, l'Islande nous a montré qu'on ne protège pas durablement la jeunesse à coup de slogans mais par l'investissement dans les structures du quotidien. Là-bas, le gouvernement a réduit de plus de 90% l'usage d'alcool et de drogue chez les 15-16 ans en proposant autre chose : du sport accessible à tous, des activités culturelles après l'école et un accompagnement parental renforcé. C'est pour cela que j'accueille très favorablement que l'article 8(2)(j) prévoit que l'agence sera responsable de coordonner la promotion des activités extrascolaires, des activités sportives et des programmes de formation de compétences de vie afin de maintenir l'engagement et la résilience de la jeunesse contre l'usage de drogue.

Le sport, M. le président, est un outil puissant de prévention et dote efficacement les jeunes d'une capacité de résilience. Ces activités sportives atténuent la vulnérabilité des jeunes et leur offrent l'opportunité d'enseigner les compétences face aux risques, leur offrant une meilleure appréhension aux épreuves de la vie et se tenir à l'écart de la consommation de drogues. C'est par la construction de liens, de sens et d'horizon que l'on éloigne les jeunes de la rue et de la dépendance.

Il nous faut également, M. le président, adopter une approche plus humaine, plus lucide envers ceux qui ont déjà sombré. Un jeune qui consomme n'est pas un criminel, c'est souvent une victime. Le Portugal a fait le choix en 2001 en orientant les usagers vers des commissions de santé plutôt que vers les tribunaux, résultats : une baisse drastique des overdoses, des contaminations au VIH et un accès facilité aux soins. Loin d'encourager l'usage, cette politique a surtout permis de briser le cercle de la honte et de l'exclusion et à travers la nouvelle loi, l'agence pourra enfin travailler de manière transversale avec les services de santé, les psychologues, les centres de traitement et les travailleurs sociaux. Il ne s'agit pas de banaliser la drogue mais de ne plus rater l'occasion d'aider un jeune à s'en sortir.

Ce que nous devons aussi affronter, M. le président, c'est la solitude silencieuse de beaucoup de jeunes. Certains décrochent de l'école, d'autres sont marqués par des violences, des abus ou une perte de repères. Ce sont souvent ces vulnérables que la drogue attire comme une échappatoire ou un anesthésiant. Il nous faut renforcer le soutien psychosocial, créer des lignes d'écoute, des centres d'accueil confidentiel et même des programmes d'entraide où d'anciens usagers accompagnent ceux qui veulent s'en sortir ; un modèle enraciné dans la confiance.

M. le président, la lutte contre la drogue ne se gagne pas en vase clos. Elle exige une communauté soudée où chaque jeune quel que soit son parcours puisse retrouver un chemin de dignité. En somme, M. le président, cette loi ne se résume pas à une énième agence administrative, c'est une boussole qui nous permettra d'aller plus loin car, oui, il nous faut aller plus loin. Cette agence nous permet de repenser notre manière de répondre au mal de vivre de notre jeunesse. Elle nous donne les moyens de faire de la prévention une réalité, de la réduction des risques une politique publique et la solidarité un principe d'action. Elle nous donne les moyens de redonner l'espoir à notre jeunesse et les moyens de créer cet avenir meilleur pour nos enfants.

Je vous remercie.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. Member.

The Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil!

(3.46 p.m.)

**Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil):** Merci, M. le président.

M. le président, là d'où je viens, je me souviens lorsque j'étais gamin de ces conseils de sage. Une fois la nuit tombée, on se réunissait sous un arbre et dissertait sur les questions sociétales, philosophiques, existentielles. Lorsque j'étais gamin, je me souviens très bien de cette question qui disait que *duniya mein sab se bhari bojh konchi hai ?* En traduisant cela – *what's the heaviest thing one can carry?* La réponse était : *burha baap ke kandha par jawan beta ke janaza*. En traduisant cela – *an old father carrying the dead body of his young son to the graveyard*. Ce que craignait nos grands-parents, nos parents, il y avait 20-30 ans, aujourd'hui malheureusement, c'est le lot quotidien des familles mauriciennes. L'honorable, à mes côtés, l'a signalé à plusieurs reprises.

Avant de poursuivre avec ma dissertation sur ce *Bill*, je regrette l'absence de l'opposition parce qu'il vient souvent, le leader de l'opposition, avec des questions inopportunes, dépourvues de sens et lorsqu'on est là pour leur répondre, ils ne sont jamais là. Mais je poursuis quand même. Lorsque le leader de l'opposition dit qu'il considère que cette loi n'est pas sérieuse parce qu'on aurait dû placer cette agence sous un comité parlementaire ; mais peut-être qu'il n'a pas lu le *Bill*. The National Agency for Drug Control Bill fait état d'une commission qui est placé sous le plus haut patronat de l'État avec le Premier ministre et le *Deputy Prime Minister*.

Si ce n'est pas suffisant pour dire qu'on est sérieux dans cette lutte contre la drogue, et bien il y a les députés de cette Chambre qui auront l'occasion, l'opportunité de questionner cette instance qui nous donneront des réponses ; c'est dire le sérieux de ce gouvernement pour œuvrer dans la lutte contre la drogue. Je regrette également, s'il était-là, je lui aurais posé cette question. Il a parlé de PILS mais pourquoi les organisations non-gouvernementales qui autrefois aidaient les toxicomanes, ont dû fermer parce que le CSR, ils avaient changé les règlements du CSR, ce qui faisait que ces ONG n'avaient plus de financement et essouffés, ces ONG ont disparu aujourd'hui.

Je prends un autre exemple dans ma circonscription – le diocèse de Port-Louis, a, depuis des années, un projet d'un centre de désintoxication à Argy, Centre de Flacq. Ils ont eu trois arpents de terre offert par Constance Ltd. Qu'est-ce qu'ils cherchaient ? Le financement de l'État à travers la CSR. Ça fait 10 ans qu'ils ont couru après le bureau du Premier ministre, les instances qu'il fallait, ils ont un zéro financement. Zéro financement ! Et aujourd'hui, je trouve regrettable qu'ils osent pointer du doigt cette loi.

M. le président, cette loi est importante parce qu'elle vient faire la différence qu'était essentielle parce que sous le MSM, le trafic de drogue et la lutte contre la toxicomanie, c'était la même chose. Un toxicomane était un vulgaire criminel ! Alors qu'avec cette loi, le Premier ministre adjoint en a parlé, qu'on fait de la lutte contre la toxicomanie une lutte essentielle. On les traitera plus comme des vulgaires criminelles mais comme des malades ; des enfants malades de notre République qui ont besoin de soins. Je remercie l'honorable Dr. Prayag pour sa dissertation très médicale sur ce sujet mais, cette loi me réjouit le plus parce que je considère la lutte contre la drogue comme étant, avant tout, la lutte contre l'offre de la drogue. Il y en a trop sur le marché !

Il y en a trop et lorsque je lis cette loi, je trouve que l'une de responsabilité de la NADC  
is –

*“(b) to coordinate the supply reduction of drugs by preventing, reducing or disrupting the entry, production and availability of drugs.”*

Il nous faut combattre l'offre de la drogue avant tout. Je vais vous dire pourquoi – parce que nous ne sommes plus face à des marchands de la drogue mais des *businessmen* de la drogue, de la mort. Ils comprennent bien le marché, ils ont bien fait les segmentations du marché de la drogue. Mon ami, qui est hélas absent aujourd'hui, l'honorable Rameshwar Etwareea, nous avait expliqué comment sociologiquement, ces marchands de la drogue, ces *businessmen* de

la drogue ont segmenté le marché – cocaïne, héroïne pour les riches mais il nous reste un large pan du marché des plus précaires, des plus vulnérables. Alors que-ce que nous avons vu aujourd'hui ? L'avènement des drogues *low-cost*, des drogues synthétiques !

Voilà pourquoi je dis que je me réjouis de l'avènement de cette loi parce que lorsqu'on regarde les divisions de la NADC, on constate qu'il y a une division ; *one of the divisions of NADC is to curb down the Supply Reduction Coordination Division. It has a Supply Reduction Coordination Division* parce que nous sommes exposés. Nos enfants, les enfants de la république sont exposés très facilement face à l'offre de la drogue.

Je me souviens de ce père de famille lorsque nous faisons du porte-à-porte à Centre de Flacq, avec l'honorable Bachoo et Ramkalawon. À première vue, sociologiquement, c'est un père de famille et on ne dirait jamais que son enfant peut tomber dans le piège de la drogue – un homme très pieux, qui a une très grande famille, des valeurs familiales très riches. Alors je lui ai posé la question – « comment ça se fait que votre fils est tombé dans la drogue ? »

Il m'a expliqué et ça fait froid dans le dos. Il me dit –

« Ecoute, tu sors un billet de R 200, je le donne à mon fils et je lui dis –

Tu sais, fiston, va au KFC du coin et va t'acheter de quoi manger ! »

Il me dit lorsqu'il sort de chez lui avec ce R 200 pour aller vers le KFC, il sera approché par au moins une vingtaine de *jockeys* qui lui tendront de drogue facilement. Je lui dis –

« Ah bon ! à ce point ! »

Il me dit il va résister au premier, au second, troisième, quatrième, cinquième sixième, dixième mais arrivé au quinzième, il cédera ! Et c'est comme ça que son fils est tombé dans le piège de la drogue.

Et je me réjouis que cette loi mette l'accent sur comment réduire l'offre de la drogue parce que nos enfants sont exposés. Pour comprendre l'ingéniosité de ces marchands de la mort, souvenez-vous de ce *landing* qu'a eu lieu à Goodlands chez un baron de la drogue ? Qu'est-ce qu'on avait retrouvé ? Un fut en plastique ! *Enn drome*, composée de quoi ? Pièce de R 20 ! Qui achète de la drogue avec des pièces de R 20 ? Ce sont des écoliers ! Des collégiens du coin !

C'est à dire que ces marchands sont prêts à aller au plus loin possible pour vendre leurs produits. Ne sous-estimez pas ces tentatives d'introduire de la drogue dans les écoles ; ils veulent pénétrer un nouveau marché – le marché des écoliers, le marché des collégiens !



Voilà ! Je n'ai pas suffisamment de temps mais je terminerai ce débat en disant que dans ce combat contre la drogue et la toxicomanie, on ne peut plus regarder le problème du cannabis avec les lunettes des années 1980, 1990. Le monde a évolué.

Je prône l'ouverture du débat sur la dépénalisation du cannabis parce qu'il y a un marché du *nissa* récréatif et au lieu de pousser nos enfants, nos jeunes vers les drogues de synthèse qui vont les tuer, c'est pour cette raison que moi qui n'a jamais fumé une cigarette de ma vie, je suis pour l'ouverture du débat sur la dépénalisation du cannabis.

Sur ce, M. le président, je vous remercie and I *support this Bill*.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you! Hon. Uteem!

(3.58 p.m.)

**The Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations (Mr R. Uteem):** M. le président, la consommation de drogue à Maurice n'est pas un phénomène nouveau. Selon le rapport de la commission d'enquête sur le trafic de la drogue, publié en juillet 2018, présidé par l'ancien juge, Lam Shang Leen, avec comme assesseur Monsieur Samiollah Lauthan et Dr. Domun, depuis au moins 1834, le *gandia* et l'opium sont consommés à Maurice.

Selon un rapport déposé aux Nations unies en 1952, il y avait en ce temps-là à l'île Maurice, 200 consommateurs d'opium réunis dans des fumeries traditionnelles et environ 400 consommateurs de *gandia*, principalement, dans des contextes sociaux-religieux. L'usage était localisé, personnel et dans la plupart des cas, récréatif.

Et puis, dans les années 80, sous le régime du gouvernement MSM – Jugnauth-père, le trafic des drogues et la consommation de drogues ont pris l'envol. Le rapport de la commission d'enquête sur la drogue, présidé par le juge, Sir Maurice Rault, publié en 1987 avait répertorié plusieurs types de drogues, consommées à Maurice, des drogues dures comme l'héroïne et surtout le *brown sugar* ! Le rapport dénonçait aussi le lien entre les trafiquants de drogue, les politiciens et aussi les membres du gouvernement.

Avec l'entrée du MMM au gouvernement dans les années 90, il y a eu une certaine accalmie. En 1996, avec ce gouvernement, le Parti travailliste-MMM, la *NATReSA* est créée en vertu du *National Agency for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Substance Abusers Act 1996*. *NATReSA* remplace le *Treatment and Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts Trust Fund Act*, avec pour objectif principal, la mise en œuvre des programmes visant à prévenir la consommation de drogues ainsi qu'à assurer le traitement et la réhabilitation des drogués.

La *NATReSA* travaillait en étroite collaboration avec les ONG et les travailleurs sociaux. Avec la *NATReSA*, les consommateurs de drogues étaient considérés comme des victimes ayant besoin de soin et de réinsertion sociale. Par la suite, un programme d'échange de seringues a été mis en place et un traitement des drogués à la méthadone fut introduit. Mais, M. le président, le retour aux commandes du MSM, avec les Jugnauth père et fils, à partir de décembre 2014, va tout chambouler.

En 2016, la *NATReSA*, qui réunissait les forces vives de la société, est abolie par pur fanatisme politique et incompétence. Elle est alors remplacée par la *Harm Reduction Unit* au sein du ministère de la Santé. Les ONG et les travailleurs sociaux sont mis à l'écart. L'industrie de la drogue connaît un véritable boom économique. De nouvelles drogues font leur apparition, notamment les drogues de synthèse moins chères et bien plus accessibles. M. le président, sous le régime Jugnauth fils, on peut parler de véritable démocratisation de l'accès de la drogue ! *La drog pa get figir*. Personne n'est épargnée. Tout le monde, indépendamment de son appartenance ethnique ou religieuse ou de sa classe sociale, est concerné par ce fléau. Les riches, les pauvres, les villes, les villages, tous y passent.

Selon une enquête nationale sur l'usage de la drogue menée en 2022, environ 111,500 Mauriciens seraient des consommateurs. Pour un petit pays de notre taille, c'est tout simplement inconcevable. Les consommateurs de drogues sont de plus en plus jeunes. On observe des cas de consommation au sein des collèges, et parfois même, dans certaines écoles primaires où des enfants s'adonnent aux drogues de synthèse. Les réseaux sociaux regorgent de clips montrant des jeunes, garçons et filles, en train de fumer des *bongs* dans un état second. Nous devenons une véritable société de zombies.

Quelle honte, M. le président, que l'*United Nations Office on Drug and Crimes* a classé Maurice au premier rang des pays africains pour la consommation de drogues de synthèse lors d'une enquête menée l'année dernière. Maurice est premier au sein de la région de SADC en matière de trafic de drogues de synthèse en 2020, selon l'indice des crimes organisés en Afrique. N'oublions pas, M. le président, sous l'ère du MSM, pas une seule condamnation de grands trafiquants de drogues pendant les dix dernières années.

Aucune volonté politique contre le trafic de drogue ! Trente ans après le rapport Rault, le rapport Lam Shang Leen fait le même constat : le même lien étroit entre des trafiquants de drogues et ceux qui sont proches du régime MSM. Ce qui rejoint le constat de l'*Organised Crime Index in Africa* dans son rapport de 2023 qui écrit et je cite –

“Despite the existence of specialised units, the fight against drug trafficking is believed to be largely cosmetic due to widespread corruption and inefficiencies in law enforcement bodies.”

Une union sacrée entre le MSM et les barons de la drogue !

*Mais tout cela va changer, M. le président.* It all starts today with this Bill and the setting up of the National Agency for Drug Control. The agency will play a crucial role for the reduction of both demand and supply of drugs in Mauritius. On the supply side, contrary to what the hon. Leader of the Opposition seems to be suggesting, the agency will not replace ADSU or any other drug enforcement agency. What it will do is to ensure a better coordination among the various drug enforcement agencies. The Lam Shang Leen Report observed at paragraph 2.14 and I quote –

“The need for an active, real and efficient regional and international corporation to exchange information, intelligence and help which is sorely lacking as deposed before us by the ADSU.”

This is precisely what the agency will do as set out in section 8 (1)(e)(iii) of the Bill where this agency will be responsible for regional and international cooperation. The agency will also have a Policy Research and Strategy Division that will collect and analyse data which will then provide valuable information to drug enforcement agencies.

The agency is also required to assist the Financial Intelligence Unit in tracing money related to drug trafficking. This is extremely important, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Allow me to explain. Today, we import most of the drugs that we consume. Other than cannabis, everything is imported. In order to import drugs, we need hard currency/foreign currency because they do not want our rupees. At the same time, when drugs are sold in Mauritius, the proceed is in rupee. The consumer pays in rupee.

So, somewhere, someone must be converting these rupees into foreign exchange which will then be used to pay for the import of drugs. Again, the Lam Shang Leen Report, at paragraph 15.1.3.6, noted that the FIU had never received any report of suspicious transaction from any money changers. This is a significant shortcoming that must be addressed and will be addressed by the agency. If there is no money, there is no forex, and therefore, no drugs.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is on the demand side that the agency will have the most crucial role to play. The action of the agency will be on three levels –

- (i) Prevention;
- (ii) Treatment, and
- (iii) Rehabilitation.

Through its Prevention and Public Awareness Division, the agency will lead campaigns at national level and also in educational institutions, place of work and place of worship. Through its Treatment and Rehabilitation Service Division, the agency will work closely with the Ministry of Health and NGOs and the Drug User's Administrative Panel for the adequate treatment and rehabilitation of drug victims.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Lam Shang Leen Report had recommended the conversion of Petit Verger Prison into a national treatment and rehabilitation centre. I am sure the agency will look into this possibility and make recommendations in due course. At the moment, there are a number of NGOs which operate treatment and rehabilitation centres. I salute them for all their efforts. Most of them are volunteers.

However, these centres, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, are not always run with professionals. Some patients have complained about ill treatment. Others have even filled kidnapping charges against the operators. Last year, at least two patients died when they were supposed to be following treatment at these rehabilitation centres. Those centres will have to be properly regulated, licensed, monitored and run by qualified drug therapists. The agency will be mandated to ensure that this is so.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the agency will also have an HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Coordination Division. The reason is because today, the main vector of transmission of the HIV/AIDS virus is through drug injection. In my constituency, I know of several women who were infected by their husbands who were themselves infected in prison. I know two women who actually transmitted the virus to their children. These women are very scared to come forward and receive the required treatment because there is still a stigma attached to HIV/AIDS victims. So, the agency, again, will have an important role to play in implementing the harm reduction programme to prevent, detect and treat drug victims who have HIV/AIDS.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I welcome the fact that the Minister responsible for Labour will be part of the National Drug Control Commission to be headed by the hon. Prime Minister and a representative of my Ministry will sit on the Drug Control Board. My Ministry has an important role to play in the prevention and rehabilitation of workers who are drug

victims. Officers from my Ministry will regularly be conducting training workshops to sensitize employers on the dangers of drug addiction but also how to cope with workers whom they suspect to be drug addicts. I am informed by officers of my Ministry that an increasing number of employers have been terminating the employment of their workers because of high absenteeism and fall in productivity linked to drug consumption. Our nation cannot afford to lose its workforce.

The biggest challenge, however, remains the provision of employment to victims of drugs once they come out of addiction. Although the law prevents any form of discrimination during recruitment process, the harsh reality, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that it is very difficult for a drug victim to find a job and this, very often, is the main reason for their relapse. We have to change our mentality. But we should also seriously consider amending the second schedule of the Certificate of Character Act. As the law currently stands, a certificate of character will always set out the conviction of any offence under the Dangerous Drugs Act, irrespective of the date on which the offence was committed. Many drug victims are convicted for possession of drug, even in small quantities for personal consumption. Once they are convicted for a drug offence, it is extremely difficult for them to find a job but not only a job, I know of cases where they were not even admitted to universities because of possession of drug. So, the only way out for these people, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, today is to apply to the Commission on the Prerogative of Mercy to get a free pardon. But not everyone is a son of the former Commissioner of Police who will get a pardon just for the asking. It is a costly procedure with uncertain outcome. The Agency will no doubt look into this matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, various NGOs and social workers who deal with drug victims have called for the legalisation of the consumption of certain types of drugs namely, cannabis; several orators before me have touched on the subject. The Bill does not envisage such legalisation at this point. But again, I am sure that the Agency will carry out the necessary consultations, will examine the consequences of legalising *gandia* and will come up with appropriate recommendations which can then be debated in this House when the time is right.

Before resuming my seat, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, allow me to express my profound disappointment with the attitude of the hon. Leader of Opposition who chose to play the role of *prophète de malheur* instead of supporting the setting up of this Agency. May I remind him that section 5(3) of Bill clearly provides that the Agency in the discharge of its functions and exercise of its power will be under the direction and control of nobody, no authority. The

Agency will appoint its own staff and consultants on such terms and conditions as the Board will determine. This is outlined in section 15 of the Bill. So, we have absolutely no qualms about the independence of this Agency. *De toute façon, M. le président, c'est la personne qui fait l'institution et je n'ai aucun doute que le tandem Sam Lauthan et le Dr. Fayzal Sulliman feront des merveilles et je leurs souhaite bon courage, la population est derrière vous. Merci.*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, hon. Minister. Hon. Minister Subron!

(4.14 p.m.)

**The Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Mr A. Subron):** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as an elected Member of Constituency No.4 and Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity, I live and witness the daily ravages and tragedies created by synthetic drugs. Synthetic drugs is the new scourge emerging from failures of past drug and developmental policies. What is the essence of this Bill in front of the House? The National Agency for Drug Control Bill? This Bill aims at supporting victims of drug addiction and not punishing them. This Bill does not criminalise people. It moves toward the decriminalisation of the victims and users of drugs, licit or illicit. This Bill is not about repression, it is about care for our people, care for our youth and future generations. This Bill marks a significant departure from failed policies' philosophy focusing on repression and prohibitionism arising from the failed war of drug policies devised since 1971 by Richard M. Nixon, the then president of the USA. This Bill, in parallel creates a new political structure and space for drug policies change. I will come back to it later.

My party, Rezistans ek Alternativ as a party having campaigned in the support of the 'do not punish movement', welcome this Bill. As a party promoting drug policy based and focused on public health, human rights, harm reduction, decriminalisation of drug users, decriminalisation regulation of marijuana, we view of this Bill as a significant step in the enlightened direction. To contribute to the present debate, it is of paramount importance to understand the relation of human society to the issue of drugs and re-establish certain facts.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the consumption of psychoactive substances is as ancient as human societies and characteristics of most cultures. It dates back to pre-history; the cultivation, use and trade of psychoactive and other drugs have occurred since the dawn of civilisation. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in Mauritius maybe some people do not realise, the marijuana, *gandia*, was legal up to 1923. People had the right to buy 5g in what was described as "*gandia ke dukan*". In the modern world, despite their widespread prohibition,

illicit drugs such as, opioids, cannabis, cocaine, amphetamine and the myriads of psychedelics and synthetics are fundamental features. Today's illicit global drug trade is among the world most lucrative and affects tens of millions of consumers, abusers or addict users or users of mind-altering drugs across the planet.

In the near recent history, we also need to remember that drug trade created wars. The British had gone to war with China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in what became known as the first and second opium wars to protect their valuable trade in narcotics. It was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that Britain and the United States outlawed cannabis. The prohibition in its campaign included alcohol prohibition in the USA which was on the repealed in 1933. This created the basis for the burst of the Mafia in the United States of America where State people colluded with the emerging Mafia to produce, trade and consume alcohol. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the United State Government let the world the major renewed search in drug prohibition called "War on Drug".

It is now widely acknowledged that repressive prohibition politics have failed. In some countries, these solely cohesive policies gave rise to neofascist regimes as was the case in Philippines, where the former President Duterte's war on drugs was a massive failure in itself. The world is now moving gradually and cautiously towards less repressive and more public health, human rights and care-based politics.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, many in the world have now realised that to dismantle or at least curb the rising power of the mafia and criminality ascension, the issue of decriminalisation and/or regulation of some presently illicit drugs like the marijuana, should be envisaged. Dozens of countries have embarked in this direction. With this Bill, we are creating the conditions and laying the foundation to move in this enlightened direction. This Bill creates, for the first time, a political structure and space that never existed in the history of Mauritius. In reality, this Bill creates a mini-Cabinet of at least 16 Ministers, adding representatives from Rodrigues to shape and redefine national objectives and goals and determining policies and priorities with regard to drug control issues. It is the first time in the history of Mauritius that such a powerful policy-making architecture is being put in place – in the first instance – and to address the issue of drug control.

This Bill is a step forward; not a goal, but a tool for change. Social movement struggling for fundamental change should realise that with this new space being created by this Government, many of us in the *l'Alliance du Changement* including *Rezistans ek*

*Alternativ*, promoting a paradigm shift will be an ally and not an obstacle to the social movements and NGOs. When debating drug issues and drug problems, it is very important as some of the hon. Members had done, to link it with class issues, with social inequalities, with poverty and drug gentrification. For example, in Mauritius we are now witnessing what we are calling circular gentrification. That is, we are getting part of our youth, the most poor and vulnerable part of our youth are being drawn, hurled – if we can say so – to synthetic drugs. We are seeing part of our youth leaving the country and we are also seeing in parallel, other people – rich people, billionaires, coming in Mauritius, replacing the displaced people for the youth hurled in synthetic drugs.

We also need to realise when talking about drugs that there is a drug for the rich. It is cocaine. There is a drug for the middle class, it is marijuana and there is a drug for the poor youngsters, it is synthetic drug. This means we also need to realise a third dimension. There has been societal change and work pattern changes which we sometime do not realise, that have changed the model, the family model whereby the youth are left unattended and without social care at some period of the day, mainly after they come back from school. We need to integrate these dimensions in the discussion that we will be having with this new architecture.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the problem is such that even if we change, if we put in place this architecture, even if we change the drug policies, if we do not reignite the love for life, the love of life, the love of nature and ignite our profound humanism embedded in our mauritianism to our youth, we need to create – as we are proposing – centres of life to emerge all around Mauritius, especially for our youth which might be a lost generation if we do not act.

May I add that in parallel, we need to rethink our developmental and economic model. To the rich and wealthy class, I am saying this; there will be no peace, no safety, no security when the poor youngsters are hurled in synthetic drugs and when our youth are departing from this country or are being replaced by either a billionaire or migrant labour.

This Bill gives hope as it respects the life of people and youngsters. There is little but there is still time to save the present generation of youth that we have, and create the conditions for such disastrous downsliding to never occur again.

With these words, I support this Bill and the amendments brought and also support the amendments proposed by my colleague, hon. Reza Uteem, on the Certificate of Morality.

Thank you.



**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you. We will suspend the Sitting for half an hour!

*At 4.26 p.m., the Sitting was suspended.*

*On resuming at 5.09 p.m. with Madam Speaker in the Chair.***Madam Speaker:** Please be seated! Thank you.

Yes, hon. Minister Osman Mahomed!

(5.08 p.m)

**The Minister of Land Transport (Mr Osman Mahomed):** Madame la présidente, notre pays a connu une augmentation alarmante de la consommation des drogues et de la toxicomanie pendant les dix dernières années, affectant gravement les individus, les familles et la société mauricienne dans son ensemble. Et, je ne dis pas cela à la légère. Celles et ceux qui me connaissent savent que pour étayer mes propos autant que possible, j'utilise des chiffres à l'appui.

Le 12 février 2020, lors du journal télévisé de la MBC 1 – donc vérifiable – j'ai pris moi-même cette capture d'écran que je vais même déposer sur la Table du Parlement. Et qu'est-ce qu'elle raconte cette capture d'écran ? Une histoire bien triste pour notre pays. Elle raconte comment en seulement six ans, de 2013 à 2019, le nombre d'admissions à l'hôpital Brown Sequard pour le traitement de la pire des drogues, la drogue synthétique, a été multiplié par plus de 200 fois, soit de 50 admissions en 2013 à 1 099 cas en 2019 à ce même hôpital.

En 2024, à la fin de leur mandat, je suis sûr que les chiffres ont explosé. Pendant la pause-café, l'honorable Jugurnauth me racontait comment dans sa circonscription, il y a environ 10 000 toxicomanes qui consomment la drogue synthétique. Et nous avons vingt circonscriptions dans le pays. Donc, je ne peux que brièvement rappeler à la population qu'en 2013, le Parti travailliste était au pouvoir, et en 2019, c'était le MSM. Ces chiffres prouvent ce que nous, au Parti travailliste, avons toujours affirmé : c'est le MSM qui est derrière la montée de la drogue dans le pays. Nous avons tout le temps affirmé cela, et c'est vrai !

Quant à nous, au niveau de l'Alliance du Changement, notre manifeste électoral, dont moi-même et l'honorable Ajay Gunness ont co-présidé sa préparation, disait ceci en long et en large, et je cite –

« Le combat contre le trafic et la consommation des drogues sera une des grandes priorités de notre gouvernement. Il faut absolument mettre fin à la souffrance des familles et de la société en général. Ce combat sans relâche sera accompagné d'une politique d'aide à l'élimination de la dépendance sur les drogues [qui seraient donc] néfastes à la santé de nos jeunes et à leur avenir. »

Et de recommander, entre autres, cette action que je cite –

« (...) nous mettrons sur pied dès notre accession au pouvoir une *Drug Enforcement Agency* qui réunira les différents organismes publics concernés pour mettre fin au trafic de drogue. »

Je suis, donc, très content et satisfait aussi que les leaders de l'Alliance du Changement ont honoré notre engagement en mettant à travers ce projet de loi la *National Agency for Drug Control* (NADC), qui, comme l'a bien souligné la presse, ainsi que d'autres orateurs avant moi, amène une nouvelle ère dans la lutte contre la drogue. Et de plus, la NADC met beaucoup d'emphase sur la coordination interinstitutionnelle en prenant l'intégration des ministères clés, les forces de l'ordre, les ONG, contrairement à la défunte NATReSA qui était limitée aux acteurs du social et du médical.

Je me souviens avoir posé une question à l'ancien Premier ministre, le 9 mai 2023, soit la question parlementaire B/401, après qu'un chef religieux de ma circonscription à Vallée Pitot, Monsieur Z. Imaman, avait, le jour dit, en 2023, demandé aux autorités avec moult détails et avec des adresses résidentielles précises de prendre des sanctions à ces particuliers qui vendent de la drogue ouvertement dans l'endroit. Dans sa réponse à moi, l'ancien Premier ministre avait essentiellement répondu que la police avait pris note des informations fournies et qu'elle allait faire le nécessaire. Mais rien de concret n'a jamais été fait.

Semblable à ce que feu Sir Anerood Jugnauth répondait à un député quand il était Premier ministre, qui lui avait donné des détails des endroits précis où la drogue se vendait au grand jour dans sa circonscription au Parlement, mais qui a reçu comme réponse d'aller lui-même faire une déposition à la police. Ladite police tombait sous sa propre responsabilité ! Donc, cette approche a donné les résultats qu'on connaît aujourd'hui.

Je suis sûr que le soldat, Sam Lauthan, fera un bon travail, car il est dit que le meilleur parmi les soldats est le soldat qui se bat pour une cause. Cela s'applique pour son collègue

aussi, monsieur Sulliman. Je connais l'engagement de monsieur Lauthan et sa sincérité depuis qu'il était ministre de la Sécurité sociale dans les années 2000, car à cette époque même, je travaillais comme ingénieur sur les neuf bâtiments de la NPF tombant sous son ministère.

J'étais son conseiller – *Adviser in Engineering Matters*. Donc, je le connais très bien. Dorénavant, quelle direction notre pays va prendre en matière de combat contre la drogue dépendra de sa détermination et de celle de son équipe et de l'efficacité de leurs actions dans la durée. Ils ont tous les moyens dont ils ont besoin du point de vue légal, car la nouvelle agence, la NADC, a le statut légal d'organisme autonome de par la loi, contrairement à la NATReSA qui était une parastatale sans autonomie claire.

De plus, la NADC, comme on peut le lire à la section 8 (e) (ii) et (iv) de la loi, aura comme fonction et pouvoir la réduction de l'offre avec interface directe avec les forces de l'ordre, les douanes, la *Financial Intelligence Unit* et les partenaires internationaux. D'autant plus, le Premier ministre l'a nommé 'czar.' Ce n'est pas donné à tout le monde, n'est-ce pas ?

Je dois souligner, Madame la présidente, qu'avec la NADC, la lutte contre la drogue devient une volonté politique importante sous l'égide même du bureau du Premier ministre, contrairement à la NATReSA, qui opérait au ministère de la Santé. Monsieur Lauthan, notre pont vers l'avenir dépend dorénavant beaucoup sur vous et sur votre équipe. Mais en vous connaissant et ayant travaillé avec vous, je suis confiant qu'ensemble, comme l'a dit le Premier ministre adjoint, monsieur Bérenger, nous réussirons.

**Madam Speaker:** Address me, not the stranger!

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** Okay.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** A nice stranger!

**Madam Speaker:** A nice stranger!

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** Madame la présidente, la loi prévoit que la NADC aura comme objectif principal la prévention, le traitement, la réhabilitation et le contrôle de l'offre, contrairement à la NATReSA qui faisait seulement le traitement et la réhabilitation des usagers de drogues. Je l'ai toujours dit, ainsi que plusieurs de mes collègues cet après-midi, que l'usager de la drogue est une personne en souffrance plutôt qu'un simple délinquant.

Comme député de l'opposition, j'ai, bien des fois, personnellement accompagné mes mandants pour leur admission au centre de désintoxication Frangipane à Beau Bassin sur demande de leurs parents. Le docteur Jhugroo qui était en charge, et par la suite, son successeur, étaient toujours prêts à aider. Ils ont beaucoup aidé.

En parlant de traitement et de son renforcement, je pense au programme de distribution de la méthadone. Monsieur Sam Lauthan était présent lors de la réunion au Ward IV à Port Louis un dimanche matin, il y a environ deux mois de cela, durant laquelle les problèmes de la distribution de ces doses, qui causent des problèmes aux habitants du quartier, furent expliqués. Surtout pour l'école Raoul Rivet qui se trouve dans le coin. J'espère qu'on arrivera à trouver une solution dans la durée à ce problème et qui sera dans l'intérêt de tous les partis, car notre manifeste électoral, à la page 55, est clair dessus. Elle stipule de –

« Revoir le programme de la distribution de la méthadone. »

La drogue est, aujourd'hui, un problème de santé publique, de sécurité nationale et de cohésion sociale menant même à des problèmes économiques. Comme ministre du Transport, je fais souvent face aux problématiques des chauffeurs sous l'influence de la drogue, que ce soit dans les transports publics ou privés. Je peux vous dire que d'ores et déjà, la loi sera, dorénavant, plus sévère envers ce genre de chauffeur.

Madame la présidente, la loi menant à la création de la NADC marque une rupture – un mot que le Dr. Navin Ramgoolam utilise souvent – mais, maintenant, c'est une réalité en matière de combat contre la drogue. Je disais une rupture fondamentale avec l'approche antérieure, c'est-à-dire une combinaison de méthodes. Donc, une approche holistique. L'équipe, qui sera constituée par le tandem Sam Lauthan et le Dr. Sulliman, aura, dans ce projet de loi, NADC, à l'approche holistique, un organe central à la fois stratégique, opérationnel et transversal avec plusieurs divisions spécialisées et pertinentes.

Madame la présidente, en guise de conclusion, la prévalence croissante de la toxicomanie à Maurice, en particulier chez les jeunes, exige une action urgente et globale pour protéger la seule ressource précieuse de notre État insulaire – le capital humain. La création de la NADC comble de manière renforcée le vide qu'avait laissé le démantèlement de la NATReSA dans notre stratégie nationale de lutte contre ce problème grave. Nous allons travailler avec sincérité afin de protéger nos jeunes et de construire le pont vers l'avenir.

Ma dernière ligne cet après-midi, est celle de feu Pape François, décédé hier, lors de son passage chez nous en 2019, comme rapportée par les journaux locaux et internationaux, par exemple, le Figaro du 9 septembre 2019 qui a comme titre et je cite –

« À Maurice, le pape s'inquiète des jeunes tombant dans la drogue ».

Quant à moi, je suis sûr que Dieu nous accompagnera car beaucoup de monde prie pour le succès de la NADC sauf les malfaiteurs. Que Dieu nous aide. Merci.

**Madam Speaker :** Merci, M. le ministre.

M. le ministre Bhagwan !

(5.21 p.m.)

**The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr R. Bhagwan):** Merci, Madame la présidente.

Madame la présidente, j'ai eu des nombreuses occasions de participer à des débats dans cette Chambre mais je dois vous dire d'emblée qu'il me semble que ce projet de loi soit de loin le plus crucial pour notre pays dans la situation actuelle.

Madame la présidente, je tiens à remercier le Premier ministre pour son engagement ainsi que le Premier ministre adjoint qui a consacré beaucoup de son temps et de son énergie à ce dossier d'importance nationale. Je salue aussi également le travail rigoureux de l'équipe de l'Attorney General et de l'Attorney General's Office. Grâce à un effort collectif, nous sommes aujourd'hui réunis autour de ce projet de loi.

Aujourd'hui, Madame la présidente, ce n'est pas le politicien ou le ministre qui intervient, encore moins un sociologue ou un addictologue, je suis simplement un observateur attentif de la société mauricienne depuis plus de 40 ans qui vous adresse la parole. C'est un père et un grand-père témoin de la lente dégradation sociale affectant principalement la jeunesse, qui se tient debout devant vous aujourd'hui, Madame la présidente. De nombreux orateurs avant moi sont intervenus pour dénoncer les liens incestueux entre les ténors de l'ancien gouvernement et la mafia de la drogue. Ils ont longuement démontré que sans la complicité tacite des autres sphères du pouvoir, une telle prolifération n'aurait pas été possible.

Beaucoup a déjà été dit dans cet auguste Assemblée sur ce drame quotidien qui brise des vies, désintègre des familles, détruit la jeunesse à Maurice et à Rodrigues. Dans chaque

dépendance, il y a la douleur insurmontable d'une mère qui a déjà pleuré toutes les larmes de son corps, d'un père impuissant de ne pouvoir ou de n'avoir pu sauver un enfant happé par le poison et nous avons vécu, et moi j'ai vécu, ce drame depuis plus de 40 ans dans ma circonscription et ailleurs. Il y a des rêves fauchés, des potentiels anéantis et des avenir confisqués.

Attention, Madame la présidente, ne croyons surtout pas que cela n'arrive qu'aux autres. La drogue s'est infiltrée partout dans nos quartiers, nos écoles primaires, nos collèges, à l'universités, dans les bureaux et jusque dans nos foyers. Cette escalade sans précédent du trafic de la drogue est ravageuse, elle affecte la performance à l'école, pousse à la déscolarisation, à la violence, à la prostitution, aux vols, aux crimes crapuleux et provoque des accidents parfois mortels. Elle se nourrit de la précarité, creuse les inégalités, gangrène notre tissu social et qu'on ne se trompe pas, la drogue ne connaît ni religion, ni caste, ni couches sociales, ni délimitation géographique, elle touche tout le monde. C'est pourquoi je pense que cette prolifération exponentielle de la drogue a altéré l'ADN du businessman mauricien et de la jeunesse mauricienne et je dis peut-être certains businessmen.

En effet, Madame la présidente, combien de businessmen se sont laissés tenter par des gros coups d'argent facile, nous avons été témoins. Pour beaucoup, la drogue est devenue un moyen rapide de s'enrichir et même si c'est au prix des vies brisées, des familles détruites. Cette prolifération exponentielle du trafic a aussi profondément modifié l'ADN de notre jeunesse, une culture où l'effort recule et où l'argent facile devient modèle. Tout cela pour vous dire, Madame la présidente, que les spécialistes de la question considèrent que le trafic de drogue et ses implications sont de loin plus graves que la drogue elle-même car le *drug money*, l'argent qui circule dans l'ombre dont personne ne connaît vraiment l'ampleur, on ignore combien il rapporte chaque jour mais on en voit les effets. Cet argent sale corrompt les hommes d'affaires, des jeunes en quête d'ascension rapide et infiltre les sphères politiques, ici, comme ailleurs, sape des fondations de notre démocratie, fragilise le socle de notre système judiciaire et menace l'état de droits.

Madame la présidente, ce que je vous dis aujourd'hui, je ne le dis pas la légère. Durant les premières années de ma carrière, entamée en 83 et vous étiez là, j'ai vu ici même, de mes propres yeux, des dérives graves : des élus pactisant avec la mafia de la drogue. Certains barons reçus ici dans la galerie des invités, ici, nous avons été témoins. Certains ont cru à un certain moment pouvoir nous faire taire par intimidation, combien de barons de la drogue

nous avons vu dans les années 83, 84, 85 dans le couloir de cette auguste Assemblée, tolérés par le gouvernement d'alors.

Madame la présidente, parmi tous les crimes qui minent notre République, qu'ils soient économiques, financiers, institutionnels ou environnementaux, le crime lié à la drogue les dépasse tous par son ampleur, par son atrocité et les conséquences qu'elle entraîne. C'est sans doute le dossier le plus grave auquel ce gouvernement est confronté et maintenant la vraie question se pose : que peut faire ce pays ? Que peut faire notre population ? Que peuvent faire les familles mauriciennes pour sauver notre jeunesse et à travers elle, l'avenir même de notre nation ? Alors, Madame la présidente, la National Agency for Drug Control, la NADC, ne sera pas une agence d'observation. Avec un conseil stratégique fort, elle coordonnera la riposte nationale sur tous les fronts : prévention, traitement, réhabilitation et réduction de l'offre. C'est en soi une avancée majeure. Je pense que les membres de la commission, les autorités, les médecins, les travailleurs sociaux, tous réalisent qu'aucun département, qu'aucune autorité seule ne peut combattre ce fléau, vu la dimension qu'il a pris d'où le but clair de la NADC : mettre fin à la dispersion des responsabilités et mener une lutte intégrée *evidence-based*, humaine et déterminée contre ce fléau.

Pour répondre à ce fléau, pour sauver notre jeunesse, pour sauver ce pays, il nous faut d'abord comprendre les facteurs qui permettent à ce trafic de proliférer. Le premier phénomène c'est celui de la marginalisation et l'avancement des inégalités. Les inégalités n'encouragent ni l'inclusion ni la cohésion. Au contraire, elle favorise l'exclusion des groupes, des sous-groupes qui deviennent des premiers cibles des viviers des trafiquants.

Deuxièmement, l'absence de la méritocratie à tous les niveaux, crée une société à deux, voire, trois vitesses. La méritocratie qui représente le fruit des résultats des efforts fournis par l'obtention d'un diplôme ou d'une spécialisation ne doit pas être qu'un mot creux ou une formule pour faire joli. Elle doit redevenir une réalité. L'injustice sociale exacerbe les factures.

Troisièmement, Madame la présidente, l'incontournable rôle de l'école. Nous venons tout juste de vivre les Assises de l'Éducation, piloté par mon collègue, l'honorable Dr. Gungapersad et le constat est clair. La république a besoin d'une éducation véritablement inclusive, participative où chacun retrouve sa place selon ses capacités. Personne et personne ne doit rester à pied ; personne ne doit être abandonnée sur le bord du chemin.

Quatrièmement, Madame la présidente, l'expression d'un esprit sain dans un corps sain n'a jamais été aussi pertinente. Le sport ne se résume ni à une compétition ni à une élection au sein d'une fédération, ni à ceux qui arrivent en tête ; le sport est un mode de vie, un vecteur de santé physique et mentale, un outil de discipline, de résilience et d'inclusion sociale. Cette culture du bien-être doit être encouragée de la petite enfance, dès le pré-primaire. Le sport est un allié précieux pour une société en bonne santé.

Cinquièmement, Madame la présidente, nous avons besoin d'une véritable révolution culturelle ; une culture nationale, vivante qui nous accompagne au quotidien dans notre transformation individuelle et collective. La culture c'est une quête ; la quête de ce qui est beau, de ce qui élève, de ce qui fait le sens. Notre ambition, en tant que nation, doit être à la hauteur de ce potentiel, créer les conditions d'un véritable éveil artistique dès le plus jeune âge parce que nous croyons que chaque enfant porte en lui un talent qui demande à s'exprimer.

Et c'est ce talent qu'il nous faut nourrir, encourager et valoriser car derrière chaque passion, qu'il s'agisse de devenir un bon guitariste, un peintre, un comédien ou un artisan, se cache une ambition. Et l'ambition lorsqu'elle est accompagnée et encadrée par des parents, les enseignants, la société toute entière pousse à progresser et à contribuer demain au progrès du pays.

Enfin, Madame la présidente, mais pas de moindre, parlons de la famille. Oui, les parents ont un rôle essentiel à jouer mais pour assumer cette responsabilité, encore faut-il qu'ils disposent d'un minimum de stabilité. On ne peut pas exiger l'engagement parental dans un contexte de précarité, d'insécurité ou des logements indignes. Encourager la responsabilité parentale, c'est aussi créer un environnement favorable, des emplois stables, logements décentes, sécurité dans les quartiers. C'est cet équilibre qui permet aux familles de remplir leur rôle pleinement.

Aujourd'hui, une autre réalité à ne pas négliger, jeunes et moins jeunes passent plus de temps connectés à un écran pour contact du réel. Où sont passés les moments familiaux, les parties de foot dans les quartiers, les balades à vélo, les cueillettes de jambons ou de goyaves de chine entre amis ? C'était ça tisser les liens. Aujourd'hui on est *connected*, comme on dit mais pas *united*. Je fais un appel aux parents –parlez à vos enfants ! Si vous voyez que quelque chose ne tourne pas rond, demander de l'aide.



Madame la présidente, le vrai problème c'est que nous refusons encore de considérer la drogue pour ce qu'elle est – un crime organisé, alimenté par plusieurs millions de dollars. Plus nous tardons à agir à la racine, plus nous laissons le champ libre aux trafiquants pour prendre de l'avance, se structurer, prospérer sans le moindre scrupule. Des descentes policières, oui, elles sont nécessaires, reconquérir les quartiers devenus des bazars, à ciel ouvert, des substances illicites. Nous avons vu que la répression seule ne fonctionne pas.

Confier ce combat exclusivement aux forces de l'ordre, c'est entretenir un système où le marché reste florissant, des prix élevés et la prolifération garantie. L'argent de la drogue sert d'abord à alimenter le mécanisme de corruption, des agents de contrôle du trafic. Il faut dire que la tentation est omniprésente au vue de sommes impliquées. Il faut un changement de paradigme, une réponse efficace qui passe par une approche intégrée. Prévention, traitement, reconstruction, accompagnement, c'est le cœur du mandat de la NADC.

Madame la présidente, l'heure est à l'action. Avec courage je me tiens devant vous aujourd'hui pour défendre non pas simplement un texte législatif mais un tournant audacieux dans notre guerre contre les drogues. Pour mener à bien sa mission, la NADC sera structurée autour des six départements spécialisés : dans la stratégie de la réhabilitation, de la sensibilisation publique à la lutte contre le VIH/SIDA et Hépatite C, jusqu'à la réduction de l'offre via une coordination resserrée entre la police, les douanes, la FIU et les partenaires internationaux.

Hélas, Madame la présidente, l'une des grandes erreurs, c'est de croire que la drogue est uniquement une question d'ordre public. Non ! C'est d'abord une question de santé publique. N'oublions pas que les usagers de drogues ont besoin des suivis médicaux, de soutien psychologique, de réinsertion sociale. C'est en ce sens que le *Treatment and Rehabilitation Services Division* de la NADC en collaboration avec le ministère de la Santé, les ONG et les partenaires privés, assurera d'un suivi personnalisé, des traitements basés sur des preuves scientifiques, une réinsertion par l'emploi, des formations aux compétences de vie et une dignité retrouvée aux personnes en voie de rétablissement. Donc, une riposte profondément humaine, pas de place à la marginalisation ! Des personnes dépendantes seront traitées, accompagnées, réhabilitées, et insérées.

La *Prevention and Public Awareness Division* aura un rôle central, campagne nationale, ateliers, programme dans les écoles, les lieux de travail et surtout un programme familial de prévention.

La lutte associée par l'encadrement des plus vulnérables – un travail de proximité est prévu avec les ONG, des chefs religieux et les médias. Chaque département aura un mandat clair, des indicateurs de performance et des synergies définies avec des partenaires et des ministères dont la nôtre, le ministère de l'Environnement. Et pour que cette machine fonctionne, place à un véritable Centre de Commandement. À la tête de la NADC, un *Drug Control Board* au commandement stratégique et au sommet une commission nationale de contrôle présidée par le Premier ministre assisté du *Deputy Prime Minister*, comprenant, l'Attorney General et des ministres dont moi-même. Rodrigues sera aussi dignement représenté.

En fin, la société civile est au cœur de cette réforme. Six membres, avec voie au chapitre, seront nommés au sein du *Drug Control Board*. Ensemble, Madame la présidente, cette lutte ne pourra être menée sans eux, engagés en première ligne. Je saisis donc l'occasion pour rendre hommage à ces hommes et ces femmes, debouts avec courage rare et sincères dans leurs combats, au plus près de ceux qui luttent pour sortir de l'enfer.

Et, j'ai une pensée spéciale cet après-midi pour feu, le Père Robert Jauffret, ancien Curé de la paroisse de Sacré-Coeur Beau-Bassin, que j'ai côtoyé dans les années 85-90, qui a osé avec beaucoup de courage, combattre les mafias de la drogue à cette époque. Il osait lui aussi confronter ces *dealers*, les réseaux, avec foi et droiture et souvent aux dépens de sa vie.

Lutter contre les réseaux criminels structurés, représente l'un des enjeux le plus périlleux du combat antidrogue comme peut en témoigner l'infatigable Sam Lauthan, choix logique à la présidence de l'agence que nous saluons tous, et victime lui aussi, il sait combien de menaces il a eu.

Alors, Madame la présidente, cette bataille, nous devons la mener ensemble en tant que nation et en tant que peuple solidaire. Comme l'a dit le Premier ministre, *we have to work together on this*. À commencer à la maison avec des valeurs : le respect, l'écoute et l'attention. Ce projet de loi, Madame la présidente, n'est pas une réponse cosmétique. C'est un engagement total de ce gouvernement. Une mobilisation générale. Notre pays a trop souffert de la drogue, de ces drames silencieux et de ces familles brisées.

Donnons, Madame la présidente, à la population des raisons d'espérer. Avec cette loi, nous bâtissons une agence à la hauteur des défis urgents. Une agence moderne et résolument humaine. Une agence qui placera la vie et la dignité au cœur de son mandat.

Je souhaite bonne chance à toute l'équipe autour de Sam Lauthan, le Dr. Sulliman et tout le personnel que cette organisation va recruter. Et aussi, à l'ensemble des techniciens du

gouvernement, des officiers du *State Law Office* pour que nous menions à bon port ce projet qui est très important, non seulement pour maintenant, mais pour les générations à venir.

Comme je l'ai dit, je souhaite bonne chance à toute l'équipe. Je vous remercie.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Minister of Housing and Lands!

(5.42 p.m.)

**The Minister of Housing and Lands (Mr S. Mohamed):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have listened with a lot of interest to all those who have preceded me. I have also read, with a lot of interest, all those who took part in the debate last week. I was not in Mauritius and I was not in the House.

However, I thought it was important for me to peruse the words pronounced in this august Assembly by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. But then, again, I cannot but state the obvious. Once again, the Opposition, on such an important debate, one of them decides to pronounce his speech – the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Second Member of the Opposition, the ally of the MSM – decides not to say a word with regard to this historic piece of legislation! A first step towards sorting out a serious problem that our society is facing.

Let the people outside of this Assembly see it clearly. Let the cameras, let the eyes of the public look at those two empty seats! What do these two empty seats show? They show the actual inability and incompetence of these two Members and the parties they belong to! For ten years, they have not been able to propose anything with regard to sorting out the drug issues. On the contrary, let me not repeat again what we all have said, Madam Speaker.

We know exactly *les gabegies*. We know what they have done, what they have not done, and what they have refused to do. We know about the planting! We know about everything. There was no strategy. The reason why there was no strategy on their part is because there was no will. Why was there no will? We know why there was no will. It is because certain people needed to be protected!

Madam Speaker, I look at the speech of the hon. Leader of the Opposition and what do I read? I quote from what he said –

« Comme c'est le cas dans plusieurs pays, nous avons décidé de traiter les usagers de drogues comme des patients qui sont ainsi sous des traitements par le ministère de la Santé. Dans la même foulée, Madame la présidente, nous avons introduit l'utilisation du cannabis médical. »

Untrue!

I have asked when is it that *cannabis médical* is allowed to come to Mauritius? I am not here attacking the hon. Leader of the Opposition by saying that he is a liar. I am not saying that! I am only saying that what he said is not true. *Comprend qui ne comprend pas!* I do not want to go against Standing Orders. Whatever he said is not true because, fact, easy to be checked, you do not have *cannabis médical* in Mauritius! In order to bring it into Mauritius, you need *une prescription*. *La prescription* that is utilised is from abroad because it has to be brought in here. But it is not accepted here. So, what is this nonsense that he is saying? Total nonsense!

Second nonsense, what does he say? –

« La possession de drogue à usage personnel a été décriminalisée depuis trois ans. »

Huge nonsense!

I have been a lawyer for many years. I have spoken to friends in this august Assembly who are barristers who know that this is not true. Maybe he does not understand what *décriminaliser* means. It makes it worse! Maybe he is just saying things only to please his ears or to please his masters who were in the habit of fooling the people and coming up with words and words and words that had no sense whatsoever. So, why do we have a speech of the hon. Leader of the Opposition that makes no sense here?

So, what is his call to fame? We call for a *commission d'enquête!* But we all know of the results of the *commission d'enquête*. We have heard hon. Dr. Aumeer who has spoken about those who were mentioned as *les acteurs principaux ou même les actrices* of what judge Lam Shang Leen found. We know! Let me pick up from what hon. Minister Subron stated. He talked about 1971, President Nixon. He talks about at the time when there was the criminalisation of drugs.

At the time when drugs were criminalised in the United States of America, that created a new category of traffickers. Before it was criminalised, traffickers did not exist. It reminds me of the time of prohibition. At the time when alcohol was prohibited, it created another category altogether. That was bootleggers. What happened during the time of bootlegging? People made money. Why did they make money? Because, precisely, the demand was such, as opposed to the supply! It was made unlawfully or traded unlawfully. There was a whole traffic of alcohol that happened, and the price went up. People made money! It became a

crime. Certain people benefited from that crime, whereas others became victims of those criminals.

The same thing happened here! What happens when it becomes a traffic? When it becomes a traffic, people make money. When you look at the statistics of Mauritius –

- (i) The number of people who are arrested for synthetic drugs is on the rise ever since 2015 onwards. On the rise!
- (ii) People will be surprised that in the health department of our country, the number of women who are admitted because of synthetic drugs is on the rise. You will be surprised that in certain categories, there are more women being admitted for synthetic drugs consumption than men.
- (iii) Year in, year out, the number of people becoming victims and falling to the ground (dying, losing their lives, losing their minds, destroying their health) is because drugs are on the rise.

And the hon. Leader of the Opposition says that they have done well? If this is called doing well, God knows what is called doing bad!

Madam Speaker, the one way to break down traffic – there is only one way – is to remove the lure. What lure is it? The lure of money! If you break down the traffic, the fact that there is money in there, you hit the pocket of the trafficker, and there will be no interest for the trafficker to continue being a trafficker. It is as simple as that.

When we look at statistics, what do we see? We see that those who are arrested the most are the consumers cannabis and consumers of synthetic drugs. There is, undoubtedly, – all the documents I have read show it – a direct correlation between the increase in the use of synthetic cannabinoids and the decrease in the use of cannabis. I see the correlation in all graphs. Not only in Mauritius, even abroad!

I know there are certain people who hold different views but then again, we should take opportunity of this debate which is a real step towards conquering the ailment that we are suffering from as a society, take advantage of it and let us not be concentrated on only one view because there are views of many that we have to look at. Here, I pick up onto what a lot of our friends today have said, Madam Speaker, “decriminalisation” as opposed to “legalisation”.

I am not for legalisation but then again let us stop for a minute and talk about decriminalisation. I have read several reports and the question that I put: how many people today are behind bars in Mauritius simply for possessing a dose of drug? Question! Statistics of Mauritius do not tell us; the Prison Services do not tell us. How many are behind bars only for simple case of possession and those are the questions that are put in various other jurisdictions. What are the benefits of decriminalisation? I am not the one saying it but I am reading from a summary of various reports ranging from the British Medical Association to the reports from the Senate in United States to reports of the United Nations, the World Health Organisation and a summary of all of it says: those are the benefits of decriminalisation –

- (i) Reducing the number of people arrested. The idea here is not to arrest someone simply because he is smoking a ‘joint’, as we put it. This is not the whole idea.
- (ii) Reducing the number of people incarcerated;
- (iii) increasing uptake into drug treatment, that is the whole idea;
- (iv) reducing criminal justice costs, and
- (v) redirecting resources from criminal justice to health systems.

Allow me from the juncture to quote what the World Health Organization has stated on this issue of decriminalisation. It says, I quote –

“Countries should work toward developing policies and laws that decriminalize injection and other use of drugs and, thereby, reduce incarceration. Countries should work toward developing policies and laws that decriminalize the use of clean needles and syringes.... Countries should ban compulsory treatment for people who use and/or inject drugs.”

Human Rights Watch what do they say, I quote –

“Drug control policies that impose criminal penalties for personal drug use undermine basic human rights... Subjecting people to criminal sanctions for the personal use of drugs, or for possession of drugs for personal use, infringes on their autonomy and right to privacy... The criminalization of drug use has undermined the right to health... governments should rely instead on nonpenal regulatory and public health policies.”

Now, those are issues that will have to be debated. The apex body that is being created through this legislation, there will be experts there – headed by experts – and they will have

to find ways and means of analysing all of this because the people out there, Madam Speaker, want to find a solution. You see, when we come with this piece of legislation, we always have questions from members of the public: what is the purpose of this legislation? In what way will it help parents who are so traumatised? In what way will it help family members who have family members of their own, or friends or neighbours who are victims to drug trafficking and drug abuse? How do we help them? Number one: let us understand that those are victims and you should see them as victims.

Those are debates that should have happened at the level of the apex body and we should also take advantage of the situation to know that if we had used a system to fight drugs ever since the 1970s, let us look at the facts, has it worked? No! The reason it will not work, is because the money is alluring. Once, if there is money in there, it does not work.

Let me try to conclude by referring what I have seen with my own eyes. I have been to Geneva at the time when I was the Minister of Labour between 2010 and 2014 under the Prime Ministership of our hon. Prime Minister now. In Geneva, I visited an NGO called Première Ligne. Première Ligne – hon. Narsinghen knows very well, he was there at the time – runs a place called Quai 9. Quai 9 is in the city centre of Geneva. And there, what do they do? You see, Mauritius, the hon. Prime Minister introduced a very important element which is the use of methadone, very important but Quai 9 have gone a step further.

They have a place where we have a register of all drug users and there is an arrangement of the police that all those drug users – those who inject heroin, those who smoke cannabis, those who sniff, all type of drugs – who are registered with Quai 9 and who come to Quai 9 to be administered the drugs are not arrested by the police because they have come into an official stream of those who want to be recognised as patients who need medical help. They go there where they are assisted by medical doctors who welcome them. They pick a number – I saw it, I have been there, I have seen it – they pick a number, they wait for their turn. A medical doctor receives them, gives them a syringe, gives them cotton, give them what they have, whatever the need, they sniff, they inject but it is done in a safe place. Prostitutes have said, ‘I no longer am afraid now. I do not have to be hit or threatened in any way whatsoever because I can go a step further in Geneva, if I want to find drugs for me since I’m a patient’ prostitutes have said, ‘I, the Government of the canton de Genève provides it to me’. Clean medical heroin, thereby killing the trade. You kill the trade because where else, if the prostitute does not go to buy it from the drug dealer, the supplier, what happens? Because the Government is providing clean heroin as a medication for that

prostitute, a woman who no longer has to rely *sur le proxénète*. This is liberation, this is strategy and has it worked? I have read the statistics, yes, law and order problems have gone down. *Agression contre les femmes* have gone down. Simple criminal behaviour has gone down. And, this has not increased the number of drug users but on the contrary, it has managed to bring them in the normal stream of employability and work. So, this is the whole idea, either we dare to be different or we simply say: 'let us use the same system that we have said use since 1970s', believing that we can in fact be better by continuing to use the same system and expecting a different result. That does not work. Madam Speaker, be it Netherlands, they have used this system. Portugal has come up with the system; now, England and I will conclude on that.

In England, they have come up with one step further, there is now a heroin assisted treatment. They have adopted the system in Geneva and what are the results, in Middlesbrough, what has happened? They have found that in actual fact, the objective has been reached whereby Government is killing the trade – drug trafficker. The money is being removed from their pockets, they no longer find it lucrative any more, the drug traffickers. They no longer want to be in that trade, they diversify as long as our people are protected.

So, this is what I humbly expect, this is what the Government wants, it wants a debate, a debate for a proper solution not a pretence as the previous government have done because while they were pretending many have fallen along the way. I remember in this House how the former Minister of Health under the MSM regime when there were questions being put to him as to what was the reason, cause of death, because of people who are admitted for use of synthetic drugs, there were, as other Members have said, other reasons were being said, pulmonary oedema, for example, was said. But every time they were hiding the truth. You can never find a solution if you don't face the reality head-on and this is what this Government is doing and this is what the hon. Prime Minister and his team is doing. I say congratulations to him, congratulations to the Deputy Prime Minister, the Attorney General. I know they have worked a lot on it. I know for a fact, the effort that the officers of the State Law Office have put in making this.

With regard to the issue of decriminalisation, there are provisions under section 28A. of the Dangerous Drugs Act under strict rules and conditions. There has not been legalisation or decriminalisation of medical cannabis. There has been no legalisation of medical cannabis as such and it is only available under strict conditions, but, as I said, in practical terms. Can



anyone in Mauritius tell me, okay, he has had a prescription that is admitted and agreed and he has brought it here? No! So, not far from us, and I will have to really conclude on that.

You know, in France, less than 0.3% of THC in CBD – it is called CBD – is legal, and it is sold off the street. Why? Because it is not something that is dangerous to society. So, either we embrace solutions that are there or we try to use the same approach. I will say it again. It has never been a solution to use the same approach when, in fact, it has never produced solutions. Now, being hard, arresting, arresting, you will end up arresting all consumers. We are here to treat consumers and we should break down the attractiveness of this trade. Remove the money! And as I said, whenever there is no money, the drug trafficker will try to diversify and do something else. Maybe it will get him to plant some potatoes, but he will not be into drugs because there will be more money in potatoes.

**Madam Speaker:** Or mushrooms?

**Mr Mohamed:** Or mushrooms, but then again, we will be very careful.

*(Interruptions)*

Maybe with certain mushrooms, we have to be very careful. But those are my observations, and I am very hopeful and the people out there are hopeful that those who have now the responsibility of suggesting changes, directions under those agendas that they have, that it will be done. We will dare to be different and we will bring daring measures.

Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you very much.

Yes, hon. Prime Minister!

(6.02 p.m.)

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, as we reach...

**Madam Speaker:** Do not think I am in favour of mushrooms!

**The Prime Minister:** Sorry?

**Madam Speaker:** Do not think I am in favour of mushrooms! We have not seen it yet in Mauritius!

**Mr Mahomed:** I like it with my omelette.

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, as we reach the conclusion of the debate on the National Agency for Drug Control Bill, first of all, I want to thank all the Members of this House for their participation and suggestions on this crucial piece of legislation. Some of the speeches were of a very high level. Some of them were opinions, like for hon. Mohamed; he expressed his opinion. I want to thank all of them. I also wish to thank the many NGOs and members of the public who expressed their views to us.

This Bill indeed marks a turning point in our nation's drug control strategy. I will address some of the concerns that have been expressed, including, *inter alia*, the centralisation of power. We must remember, Madam Speaker, that the drug crisis in Mauritius is complex and multidimensional. We need a balanced multipronged approach, if anything else, and this Bill provides a framework for prevention, treatment and care, but also rehabilitation, accountability; not just drug control.

Let me turn to some specific points raised by hon. Members, starting with the hon. Leader of the Opposition, who is not here now. He raised the issue of having consultations on the drafting of this Bill. On this point, I must inform the House, I must inform him as well, that consultative meetings were held. The first one was held on 17 March of this year. There were representatives of 34 institutions and NGOs. The draft Bill was presented to the participants, followed after that by interactive actions. Proposals were taken into account, and then we finalised the Bill.

Let me also remind the Leader of the Opposition – I know he is not here, but I am doing as if he is there – that we are not following the practice of just rushing through the legislative process without listening to what others had to say – the NGOs, the civil society representatives. I must also underline that, over and above consultations, the Drug Control Board will also consist of representatives from relevant ministries and NGOs. And I must say, the Office of the Attorney General and the State Law Office worked and took on board all these suggestions that were made.

The Leader of the Opposition also raised concerns about the future of NGOs like PILS in our new structure. Let me reassure the House. We value the NGOs as vital partners, especially in the areas of HIV/AIDS. We have to look at not only harm reduction but community integration. I have talked to Mr Ritter and maybe we need to put him there; maybe he will be interested in being part of this. I do not know. He is always ready to help. That is the point.

The NADC is not here to replace them but to ensure coordination among relevant stakeholders and empower them under a unified national strategy. Their work will continue, but with more support, not less.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has also asked whether NADC will be carrying out drug seizures. I thought the Bill was clear. I suppose the Leader of the Opposition does not realise, as the Deputy Prime Minister rightly pointed out, that this Bill is not just about seizures and repression. It is also about rehabilitation, about the treatment of victims of the drug barons. The Bill is very clear, I thought. The National Agency for Drug Control will be a coordinating and monitoring body. One of its main functions is to coordinate and facilitate efforts at a national level towards the implementation of a National Drug Control Master Plan, the national action plan, HIV/AIDS and all those control strategies. Drug seizure falls under the purview of the Police and Customs, Antinarcotics Section of the MRA. Drug seizure is not the business of the NADC. It is for the Police, the Customs, MRA to deal with that.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has also raised the issue of a real-time monitoring system. The National Agency for Drug Control Bill provides for the introduction of a Real Time Monitoring system to modernise the treatment of drug use disorders by putting technology at the centre of care. This centralised, digitalised plan will track patients, track their progress in real time, will cover referrals, treatment, relapse, follow-up care, bringing in together all the healthcare providers, as well as the NGOs and the other correctional services. The system will aim at improving continuity of care, reducing service duplication – very often we see that – and supporting evidence-based decisions. It must be evidence-based. We cannot say it just because we think of something. We need the evidence. It will also strengthen the National Drug Observatory's ability to monitor outcomes and address gaps, offering a more transparent, coordinated and effective response to drug dependence.

Madam Speaker, with regard to the question of whether the definition of drugs under section 7(b) of the Bill includes precursor chemicals, I wish to inform the House that this is already catered for under the Dangerous Drugs Act, under the Fourth Schedule. However, under NADC's mandate, the Supply Reduction and Coordination Division will work in close collaboration with law enforcement to monitor, regulate, intercept trafficking and misuse of precursor chemicals.

The Leader of the Opposition has also expressed scepticism regarding methadone maintenance. He referred to it as another form of dependency. I was really surprised. I do not know where he gets all these ideas from. We must not confuse treatment with abandonment. Methadone, when properly administered, has been endorsed by the World Health Organisation as the gold standard for opioid pharmacotherapy. Unlike illicit drugs, methadone is regulated, its effects are predictable, allowing users a chance to reintegrate society, hold jobs, rebuild families, and live with dignity. But, as I say, it must be properly administered.

That is the point! It is the same for any other medicine. If you were to take 16 Panadol's – the doctors will know –, you are going to be in a lot of trouble. You have to know the dose. You have to regulate.

Of course, tapering and exit strategies are part of the long-term rehabilitation plan. But, again, this must be guided by evidence and nothing else. Let me also highlight what the WHO recommends. It says, and I quote –

“The longer a person stays on methadone, the better is the final outcome.”

So, we will stand guided by science and evidence-based practices, and international recommendations.

We should not play with the lives of people just for political gain or for political convenience. The real mistake that they made when they came to power was halting the methadone programmes abruptly in 2015. I do not know; do they not read? Do they not consult doctors? But they think they know! They said, ‘No, we must stop the methadone programme.’ A mistake that cost lives! Dr. Aumeer knows what I am referring to. It cost lives. People died because of this!

As we say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. After a while, there was a doctor from Reunion Island who wrote an article, which was published in the papers here, to say this is a terrible mistake to stop the methadone programme. But the former government ignored him. Then, eventually, they had to swallow back what they had said and what they had done, and they had to restart the methadone programme.

Quietly, the methadone programme was restarted. They realised their mistake too late, and lives were lost because of their incompetence.

Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition also questioned why the National Agency for Drug Control should fall under the direct chairpersonship of the Prime Minister. Madam Speaker, I think the Deputy Prime Minister made it very clear that we must be unequivocal. This is not just about control; it is about a scourge that is destroying our country. The MSM has been criminally negligent. They have rubbed shoulders with the drug barons, and they have allowed them to operate. Not only that, we also know what they have done. They wanted to have the others who were not necessarily the big drug barons but who were in the business; to stop them, planting and all those things were done so that the drug barons might be able to work and have the whole country for themselves. That is what they did!

This Government does not have the luxury of sourcing responsibility in the face of a national emergency. We are dealing with an epidemic that has touched every corner of this country. From cities to villages; every corner! This epidemic of addiction and trafficking has spiralled into a public health security and social cohesion crisis. We have to ensure that the immunity that the drug barons enjoyed is over! It will not happen! This is why it is I, the Prime Minister, who should lead it together with the Deputy Prime Minister and the other ministers. I think there will be 16 ministers in all. Also, NGOs, the Police, ADSU, etc.

Let us not forget that under the previous regime, responsibility was scattered. I do not know whether it was done on purpose. It was diffused. It was scattered. Nobody knew what they had to do. There was inaction. Agencies were created – I do not know whether just to pay the boys...

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** And girls!

**The Prime Minister:** ... and girls – with no clear purpose. Nothing was clear. Commissions and authorities were formed and ignored. We saw what happened to the commission of inquiry. Also, known traffickers were allowed to walk free. This will not happen under this Government. Never, never, never! We mean business. *On va être, comme je l'ai dit dans le passé, intransigent, Madame la présidente.*

The hon. Leader of the Opposition also raised the issue of the Certificate of Character for small drug users. We too have said that we will relook at the issue of Certificates of Character in its entirety. I think it is not right – again, it is an opinion – that a sword should hang upon somebody’s head during his lifetime. We should relook at this.

With regard to concerns relating to the setting up of a Drug Control Board and a National Drug Control Commission, I wish to inform the House that both instances have been clearly defined with complementary responsibilities.

I will propose amendments at Committee Stage to delete section 4 of the Act, relettering the paragraph accordingly, as I have circulated.

It is not the function of the National Drug Control Commission, in fact, to collect and analyse data. This is provided for in section 8(v) as the function of the National Agency for Drug Control.

Let me also address the issues raised by hon. Mrs Leu-Govind. She proposed that the Minister of Tourism be added in the First Schedule. I would like to point out that section 3(f) provides for the Prime Minister to designate other ministers. The problem is that we have 16. I know that tourism is very important in this. But we already have 16 ministers, plus the Prime Minister. But I have the possibility of co-opting the Minister of Tourism as and when the need arises.

Hon. Mrs Leu-Govind also raised the need to have a rapid test to allow the Police to detect drugs. I wish to assure the House and the hon. Member that the Police will be provided with all the necessary equipment, as we are reorganising FSL, because we want quick results. At the moment, the hon. Member is absolutely right; it is taking ages to get results. How can you deal with drugs when you cannot have the results quickly? It has to be very, very fast. This is what we are going to concentrate upon.

With regard to the issues raised by hon. Quirin pertaining to the role of the National Drug Secretariat and National AIDS Secretariat, I wish to inform the House that the general role of the National Drug Secretariat will be taken over by the NADC. However, the following responsibilities of the National Drug Secretariat will be integrated at the level of my Office, that is, reporting to international institutions, namely the African Union and the UNODC. It will act as a focal point to liaise with national focal points of other countries and

the publication of quarterly and annual reports. As for the National AIDS Secretariat, its role will be taken over by the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Coordination Division of the Agency.

Regarding the proposal of hon. Quirin for a referendum to be held for the legalisation of cannabis, as the House is aware, provision is not made in the law for the organisation of a referendum on such matters. In any case, we have to be very careful with referendums. They have drawbacks. Very often, it reduces the debate because the answer is either yes or no. It reduces the debate. Well, this is a complex issue.

Madam Speaker, amidst the ongoing national and international debates on drug policy, the distinction – what hon. Shakeel Mohamed has laid emphasis on – on depenalisation, decriminalisation and legalisation of cannabis for personal use is both significant, but it is a debate that we must have. Everybody has an opinion.

Let me clarify the distinction in the definitions of depenalisation and legalisation. Depenalisation means removing criminal penalties for possession and personal use of small amounts of cannabis. Depenalisation means that while the substance remains illegal, it still is illegal. Individuals are not imprisoned or criminally prosecuted. Instead, they may receive warnings or fines or be referred to health services. A model which upholds depenalisation aims to reduce pressure on the justice system and shift the focus towards health and social support.

While on the other hand, legalisation means the use, possession, possibly the cultivation and sale of cannabis under legal/regulated conditions. Countries like Canada, I think you mentioned, Uruguay, the State of California, among others, have adopted this approach. They treat cannabis the same way they would treat alcohol or tobacco, with some safeguards.

In Mauritius, cannabis is still listed as a dangerous drug under the Dangerous Drugs Act. However, the introduction of the Drug Users Administrative Panel under section 34(2) of this Act makes its evolution in our National Drug Control Strategy, reflecting a human rights-based approach for people who use drugs.

The Government remains firm on combatting drug trafficking and protecting public health and is increasingly open, but, again, to evidence-based policies. There is room for dialogue; even for cannabis, there are debates. Some people say it is still dangerous. We have

to look at the evidence. There is room for dialogue on whether depenalisation combined with enhanced treatment services could offer more effective and humane care, but we have to debate. We cannot make our mind now. We have to debate!

With regard to the query raised by hon. Edouard on the provision for Rodrigues to be represented on the Drug Control Board, I reflected on his suggestion, I spoke to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Attorney General, and I thank him because I think what he has said is very valid. I also thank hon. Mrs Henriette-Manan – I was listening to her speech in my office – for having commented on this. It is very valid. There is a risk of that from time to time... I think we will propose an amendment later on at Committee Stage at clause 3 to ensure that the Chief Commissioner of Rodrigues is represented on the Drug Control Board. It makes sense that Rodrigues is fully on board and all the time instead of “whenever, may”, as we said “may”. Tailored initiatives will be implemented in Rodrigues, including school prevention programmes, community outreach and targeted media campaigns. Health Care Services will expand to include methadone treatment and Real Time Monitoring at the Rodrigues Regional Hospital. Harm reduction measures for HIV/AIDS and youth engagement programmes will also be introduced.

Madam Speaker, today, we are making history. It shows, as the Deputy Prime Minister said, that unlike the MSM, we intend to take the bull by the horns. We will not shy away from the decisions we have to take. We are through this legislation establishing a modern, coordinated and compassionate system to address one of the greatest public health and security threats of our time. Let us rise above this trying to score political points and act decisively. Let us shield our youth, our families, and our society from the odious and nefarious effects of drugs and drug traffickers.

The National Agency for Drug Control positions Mauritius as a trailblazer in adopting a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach to drug use prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, harm reduction and drug control, and we have chosen two well-known personalities, not anybody. Mr Sam Lauthan, former minister, is known for his determination to combat drug abuse. He was threatened in the past; I am sure he is going to be threatened again, but he is well-known for that. There is nothing that will make him move an inch. And there is Dr. Fayzal Sulliman, who is a graduate of Johns Hopkins University. I don't know how many of you know about this university; you don't get there if you are no good. That I can tell you for



sure. His CV speaks for itself, and I think with these two people, I have no doubt that we are heading in the right direction as far as drugs are concerned.

With these words, Madam Speaker, I commend the Bill to the House. Thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill read a second time and committed.*

## COMMITTEE STAGE

*(Madam Speaker in the Chair)*

### THE NATIONAL AGENCY FOR DRUG CONTROL BILL

**(NO. VI OF 2025)**

*Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 3 (National Drug Control Commission)*

*Motion made and question proposed: “that the clause stand part of the Bill.”*

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Chairperson, I move for the following amendments to clause 3 –

“in clause 3 –

(i) in subclause (2), by adding the following new paragraph, the full stop at the end of paragraph (f) being deleted and replaced by the words “; and” and the word “and” at the end of paragraph (e) being deleted –

(g) the Chief Commissioner of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

(ii) by deleting subclause (3), the existing subclauses (4) and (5) being renumbered as subclauses (3) and (4), respectively;”

*Amendments agreed to.*

*Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 4 (Functions and powers of National Drug Control Commission)*

*Motion made and question proposed: “that the clause stand part of the Bill.”*

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Chairperson, I move for the following amendment to clause 4 –

“in clause 4, by deleting paragraph (e), the existing paragraph (f) being relettered as paragraph (e) and the word “and” being added at the end of paragraph (d).”

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Clause 4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 5 to 28 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*The Schedules ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*The title and enacting clause were agreed to.*

*The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.*

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

## **PUBLIC BILLS**

### *Third Reading*

*On motion made and seconded, the National Agency for Drug Control Bill (No. VI of 2025) was read a third time and passed.*

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**The Prime Minister:** Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 06 May 2025 at 11.30 a.m.

**The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.**

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Madam Speaker:** The House stands adjourned!

I have one hon. Member who wants to intervene, hon. Ramkalawon!

## **MATTERS RAISED**

(6.30 p.m.)

### **QUEEN VICTORIA – TAXI OPERATORS – ENQUIRY**

**Mr C. Ramkalawon (Third Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil):** Madam Speaker, my request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Land Transport. Will the hon. Minister kindly investigate into the number of taxis operating in the locality of Queen Victoria whereby my constituents have complained that despite adequate taxi licences having been allocated, few are actually operational causing prejudice to the inhabitants who have only taxis as means of public transport? Please, consider.

**The Minister of Land Transport (Mr Osman Mahomed):** Yes, certainly Madam Speaker. I will certainly ask the NLTA to conduct an enquiry and take remedial measures as needed.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, Mr Beehook!

(6.31 p.m.)

#### LAND CONVERSION - APPLICATIONS - BACKLOG

**Mr R. Beehook (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil):** My request is addressed to the hon. Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries. Can the hon. Minister, please, look into the backlog in the number of people who have applied for land conversion which is taking months and months and people complained because very often they have bank loans which have been approved which lapsed because they haven't received their land conversion?

**The Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries (Dr. A. Boolell):** I take on board, Madam Speaker, what my hon. friend is saying but this is also a matter that has to be properly scrutinised. More so, when we talk of land conversion, we have to make sure that the process is being done as should be but I take on board what you have suggested.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you, hon. Minister. We are done. Thank you.

*At 6.35 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 06 May 2025 at 11.30 a.m.*