

**Address by HON L.D. DOOKUN LUCHOOMUN**

**Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Education & Tertiary Education,  
Science and Technology**

**Annual Meeting with Laureates**

**Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

**Ag. Senior Chief Executive**

**Permanent Secretaries,**

**Ag Chief Technical Officer,**

**Advisors,**

**Directors of the Parastatal bodies and of the Ministry**

**Dear Laureates, Parents, Friends,**

**Members of the Media,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is a great pleasure for me to be in your midst today and address you this morning. This get together is one that my Ministry organizes annually as a form of recognition of all those who would have distinguished themselves in the end-of-cycle HSC examinations.

At the very outset, therefore, I would like again to convey to you, laureates of the HSC 2022 exams, my sincere congratulations for your brilliant performance.

Allow me to also extend my heartiest wishes to the first recipients of the SAJ Scholarships Scheme. You have every reason to be proud of being the first Laureates under a scheme named after such a great statesman as Sir Aneerood Jugnauth. But do remember that glory comes with responsibility: you will be expected to further his mission to make the country progress economically. We all now look forward to your engaging in new areas of industry and finance so as to take the country towards innovative trajectories.

*Décidemment, mes chers amis, c'est une année où on fête des premières !*

Let me now extend my congratulations to the new awardees of the HSC Pro scholarships. Clearly, as it can be seen, my Ministry is keen on encouraging innovation in education in all areas. The reason is not far to seek: We must provide further opportunities to our learners to engage in new sectors of significance to the economy and industry, especially in those that rely upon skills and the application of knowledge.

A word also to laud the good performance of many of your friends and others who have done very well in their HSC although they did not bag the laureateships. Many of these are on the ranked lists issued by Cambridge, and, who knows, they perhaps figure among the best performers worldwide. So, don't give up. Never flag in your efforts to excel. One day or the other, the results will pay off.

### **Dear parents and students**

I believe we all recognize that the last few years have been extremely challenging for all of us, certainly for us at the Ministry and definitely for you, parents and your wards. We had to hit the ground running and learning the hard way.

Desperate times called for desperate measures.

Yes, we had to extend the calendar year due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Yes, many of our learners had to develop coping strategies so as to upend the resulting social and emotional stress.

But I am glad to see that, despite all hurdles, your efforts did pan out in the direction you wanted them to. If nothing else, the success in overcoming those extremely difficult academic and psycho-emotional draining years is a

manifestation of your fortitude and of your desire to build stronger capabilities as a bulwark to your future careers. I, for one, am not surprised that this HSC 2022 cohort has been a strong one in terms of performance and output.

I now look forward to your continuing to keep the flag of excellence flying high as you now position yourselves at the doorstep of university education.

**Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As I stand before you today, I strongly believe it is my duty to highlight some important facets of what awaits you, especially the Laureates, as you prepare to take your first steps in the field of higher education and, gradually, into the adult world.

Mind you, this will not be in the form of a preachment!

Again, what I will first be insisting upon may appear to you to be a bit premature. But believe me, it is not. It rather relates to your responsibilities as young, upcoming citizens having a major contributory role to play in the sustainable development of the country and, by extension, of the global community.

**Let me start with a basic fact.**

The United Nations World Youth Report of 2020 confirms that young people in the age group of 15 to 24 years account for 16 percent of the global population. Closer to us, on the Continent, we have been persistently speaking of the ‘Youth Bulge’. Indeed, in 2020, the median age in Africa stood at 18.8 years while the continent is slated to have 800 M young people under the age of 25 in 2050, compared with less than 200M for Europe.

Thus, across the world nowadays, their sheer numbers aiding, the cry among the youth is to do away with the “voice poverty” they have been subjected to.

More and more, now, they want to be heard, to be unavoidably seen as deserving a place at the table.

Now, while it is true that we, in Mauritius, are having a definite demographic decline, this does not absolve you, young persons, from shouldering your future responsibilities. Indeed, there are issues worth fighting for, worth militating and becoming an activist for: the associative risks of climate change, the increasingly divisive inequalities and inequities in the world, but also the need to contribute to sustaining the local developmental resilience and the like.

I would love to see how the education you have received so far has prepared you to stave off, to neutralise all complacency and made of you active citizens of the world. I would indeed love to witness, as you move further into adult life, your capacity to think Global and act local, to go ‘glocal’, as we say.

**Dear Laureates,**

Let me also bring to the table a new reality that you will inescapably have to contend with.

In the course of discussions in the classroom, among peers and also with your parents and adults around you, you would have realised that the very nature of work is changing – and changing fast.

Owing largely to the inroads made by technology and AI, the 2020 World Economic Forum Report indicates that around 85 million jobs can be displaced by 2025, with automation taking over a larger portion of the roles. For its part, a 2021 PwC survey of global CEOs reveals that almost 50% of them intend to significantly increase their long-term investment on digital transformation.

And please, in parenthesis, let us not blame technology and Artificial Intelligence for that. We cannot blame ChatGPT, the latest buzzbot on the AI landscape, can we? It is not the trigger but the finger that pulls the trigger that is the defining element. Technology is basically neutral. As Noam Chomsky, perhaps one of the genuinely leading intellectuals of the current times, stated, technology is like a hammer that can build a house or “crush someone’s skull.”

The bottom line is that it is how we decide to use it that makes the difference.

These two above references to the World Economic Forum Report and the PWC survey are nonetheless portentous, even ominous, where job loss and job transformation are concerned. Consider this: many of the jobs that were till recently qualified as '**Jobs of the Future**' are fast becoming, due to the post-pandemic compression of time, the '**Jobs of the Now!**'

Therefore, be alive to the fact that the world of Higher Education, the Universities you will be attending, will have one key objective—the development of your future skills, namely, complex problem solving, developing a sense of responsibility, of finding alternative ways of facing challenges and dealing with uncertainty.

This would thus go beyond the current emphasis on knowledge acquisition and studying based on defined curricula for fixed professions.

Be then ready to anticipate change, to be tenacious and resilient and, especially, be prepared to engage in lifelong learning that will facilitate your upskilling and reskilling for a constant growth.

In short, get yourselves keyed up to be non-conformists.

Create within yourselves a mindset for disruption.

Allow me to pause for a minute here to open another parenthesis.

**Ladies and gentlemen,** I am glad that numerous students have demonstrated the ability to master the academic and intellectual rudiments necessary to make a name for themselves as they grow older. But I have always insisted on the whole person development of learners, on the need for all of them to grow into morally, ethically and socially well-rounded individuals. They need to incarnate sound values on which our society can thrive.

In a multi-ethnic, multicultural society like ours, we would like you our youth to demonstrate respect for others and to value our differences. It is such differences that in fact contribute to our rich heritage that tomorrow you will be expected to bequeath to future generations.

I certainly hope that the Laureates of that institution would have done some reflection on what they could possibly do between now and the resumption of their HE studies to help inculcate a greater sense of responsibility and tolerance in their younger peers at the school.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Before I end, allow me to seize this opportunity to thank all the heads of schools, Educators and all the support staff for all the hard work and encouragement they put in for your success.

**Laureates,** I would also fail in my duty if I did not place on record the efforts of your parents, your friends and well-wishers who certainly extended their encouragement in your engagement with your studies. Families are always at the heart of the outstanding performance in education, and this close support from responsible parties has undoubtedly made possible this outstanding result. I'm sure your parents are very proud of you as you close this chapter of your studies and prepare for the next level of higher studies.

Just make sure that, in all humility, you also recognize and reciprocate the devotion, the love and attention extended to you. After all, as the Swahili proverb has it,

*“One does not refuse water to the digger of the well.”*

***Thank you all for your kind attention.***