

**SPEECH BY HON (MRS) LEELA DEVI DOOKUN**

**VICE PRIME MINISTER,**

**MINISTER OF EDUCATION, TERTIARY EDUCATION, SCIENCE &  
TECHNOLOGY**

**Inauguration of SENRDC Rodrigues**

**Chief Commissioner Rodrigues Regional  
Assembly – Mr. Franceau Grandcourt**

**Deputy Chief Commissioner, Commissioner  
for Education – Mr. Johnson Roussety**

**Senior Chief Executive - Ministry of  
Education, Mrs Sandrine Valere**

**Chairperson SENA – Mrs. Savitree Oogarah**

**Director SENA- Mr. Deewakarsigh  
Authelsingh**

**Ag Health Director, Queen Elizabeth  
Hospital- Dr. Cassimir**

**Departmental Head, Commission for  
Education.**

**Chairperson REDCO**

**Head Primary Commission for Education**

**Managers, SEN Schools.**

**Staff of SENA**

**SEN learners**

**Parents**

**Distinguish Guests**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

**Good morning.**

It gives me great pleasure to be present this morning for the official launch of the

**SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS  
RESOURCE AND DEVELOPMENT  
CENTRE** at Petit Gabriel, Rodrigues.

I am even more pleased when I see that this Centre and the support that it will provide to learners with special education needs will go a long way towards helping us all realise the goal of Inclusiveness. Inclusiveness, as we all know, is one of the three pillars on which our education system as a whole rest, the other two being Quality and Equity.

In fact, Government Program 2019-2024 itself has put Inclusiveness at the Heart of the Nation and my ministry has been systematically introducing policy measures to have everybody on board, no matter what the possible stumbling block. Thus, Government ensures that neither economic hurdles nor social inequalities nor, again, geographic distance debar our learners from having a fair access to high quality education.

We have seen to it that Education **for All** and **No Child Left Behind** are no mere slogans.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

By putting the learners at the very core of the education system, we are responding to the global commitment Mauritius has taken

vis-à-vis various Conventions and Declarations. As we well know, Article 26 of the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 places a premium on the right of everyone to education. Thus Inclusive Education must be regarded as a basic human right.

Across the decades, therefore, the inescapable concern for Inclusive education has been gaining its *lettres de noblesse*. The Convention against Discrimination in Education of 1960 plebiscited it, as did the Salamanca Statement that was adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994 and the Incheon Declaration of 2015.

As for the 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, Sustainable Development Goal 4 could not

be more explicit – ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’.

Allow me here to also refer to **Article 24 of the United Nations Convention for the Right of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** that equally stipulates that States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. Exclusion from education based on disability is not, can never be an option. Obviously, then, with a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties have to see to the provision of an inclusive education system at all levels and for the sake of lifelong learning.

We fully subscribe to that principle. In fact, since the time I have been entrusted with the responsibility of the Education sector, my focus has been on formalizing the Special Education Needs domain as an essential component of the sector.

As you are well aware, under the Special Education Needs Act 2019, the Special Education Needs Authority has been set up as a statutory body to regulate and facilitate evidence-based policies and quality provisions in special and inclusive education in the Republic of Mauritius.

I am glad that both the Chairperson and the Director of the SENA are with us here today and they will certainly be keen to keep both the face-to-face interaction and the narrative on SEN provision going.

Obviously, it gives me great satisfaction to note that Commission for Education has aligned its vision and mission to the Inclusive Agenda of the government and that of the SDGs. Of direct relevance to us today is the fact that the Commission has made a fully justifiable provision for the setting up of a Special Education Needs Resource and Development Centre (SENRDC) in Rodrigues.

That, in itself, ladies and gentlemen, testifies the commitment of the Regional Assembly to support learners with disabilities.

This Special Education Needs Resource and Development Centre is very clearly going to be action-oriented. We want every child with a disability to benefit from the services

of the paramedical team of SENA for diagnosis of the type of disability and screening of learners for enrolment to a SEN school. It will also be responsible to dispense therapy services to learners registered with SENA.

I believe that the SENRDC has a functional occupational therapy room, a physiotherapy room and space to accommodate psychology services. Provision has also been made for audiology and speech therapy services.

In addition, the paramedic team will equally chart out an evaluation system based on well- defined indicators and feedback from the Individual Education Plan (IEP). The information gathered may then be used as recommendation aiming at giving each



child the best possible opportunities for his/her integrated development, protection and education.

Of course, Ladies and gentlemen, this is one aspect of the education for learners with disabilities. I'll call that, broadly, the 'hardware' part.

This, I have always strongly felt, needs to be complemented by the 'software' part when we deal with learners with disabilities.

I am genuinely glad that Managers of SEN schools, staff and parents are with us here today.

Because there are issues that you, dear friends, can address at your several levels.

Our learners require a from-the-bottom-of-the-heart emotional and social support.

They need a high sense of empathy and understanding that is their legitimate due. We need, as well, to provide them with a positive school culture that is more amenable to respond to their needs just as much as they would warmly welcome an active parental and community engagement.

How do we envisage making these a reality if ever they do not currently prevail—and, if they do, how do we propose to improve on and sustain them?

On the other hand, technology has already started making major inroads in our schooling system: we cannot even start to envisage leaving learners with disabilities on the curbside! They are as deserving as the learners in general education.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

These are just some elements we should all ponder on and mull over as we engage ourselves more fully in giving our learners their rightful due.

This SENDRC at Petit Gabriel, in a general manner, becomes a giant stride in that direction. My heartfelt congratulations to all of you who have been actively involved in making it a reality.

It is my earnest wish that the operation of this SENRDC at Petit Gabriel serves the purpose it is intended to, as during my mandate as minister, I have pledged for a 'Republic Fit for Children' where every child will be given the opportunity to "Grow to his/her potential and become a responsible adult citizen."

***Thank you very much for your kind attention.***