

**Address of Hon Mrs. Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK
Vice Prime Minister
Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology
Africa Day 2024
University of Mauritius**

Protocol

- **Dr Louis Jean Claude Autrey, GCSK, CSK, Chancellor, University of Mauritius;**
- **Honourable Maneesh Gobin, Attorney General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade;**
- **His Excellency Albert M. Muchanga, African Union Commissioner for Economic Development, Tourism, Trade, Industry, Mining;**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps;**
- **Mr Preaduth Chitamun, CSK, Pro-Chancellor and Chairperson of UoM Council;**
- **Professor Sanjeev K. Sobhee, Vice-Chancellor, University of Mauritius;**
- **Eminent Keynote Speakers;**
- **Distinguished Guests;**
- **University Staff and Students;**

- **Students, and faculty of the University of Mauritius;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Good afternoon to all of you.

It is an honour to be amongst you this afternoon for the celebration of Africa Day 2024.

Today, we gather not only to celebrate the richness of our African heritage but also to reflect on our shared future. The theme, "*Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century: Building Resilient Education Systems for Increased Access to Inclusive, Lifelong, Quality, and Relevant Learning in Africa,*" is both timely and urgent. It is also a fitting reminder that the African Union has decreed 2024 as the Year for Education in Africa, thereby highlighting the importance of education in achieving sustainable development and cutting down poverty rates.

Therefore, it the collective duty and responsibility of member states of the Union to reimagine and reinvent our educational frameworks to meet the demands of an ever-evolving global landscape.

As we move forward, it is imperative to acknowledge the pivotal role that education plays in shaping the destiny of our continent. Education is the bedrock upon which we build resilient societies, foster innovation, and drive sustainable development. Through education, we empower our youth to navigate the complexities of the 21st century, thrive in the future of work, and contribute meaningfully to the global community.

Interestingly enough, celebrating Africa Day reminds me of the powerful words of Kofi Annan, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations:

"Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy, and sustainable human development."

A message that all African countries and African citizens must remember and extol – education ***is*** the cornerstone of progress in all spheres of life. It defines all other sectors and is essential for all other developments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe there is realism in stressing that Education is going to be the vehicle, the instrument that will make the African Renaissance a reality. We know the key values on which such a Renaissance rests—social cohesion and solidarity among the nations and their peoples; democracy and sound governance; economic growth and elimination of economic disparities; and, especially, the geo-political standing of Africa.

For Africa has a voice, and that too a powerful one and it needs to make it more forcefully heard in global affairs.

Interestingly, all these values are fully captured in the 7 Aspirations of AU's Agenda 2063 that is a 'master plan' adopted in January 2015 with a view to transforming Africa into a global powerhouse.

Today, as we celebrate Africa Day, it behooves us to believe that this is no pipedream, that these aspirations can be and will be met.

Africa is today on the right side of history. It has a lot going for it, despite some pockets of inadequacies.

Illustratively, urbanization is growing exponentially; a noticeably decreasing number of conflicts and an increased availability of resources. Technology is making a deep impact, with ‘mobile money’, for instance, being ubiquitous as witnessed by the surge of e-payments that are projected to reach around \$ 40 billion by 2025.

But perhaps the biggest asset of Africa is its youth population. By 2030, it is expected that African youth will constitute 42 percent of global youth. Indeed, the OECD noted in a recent report that Africa is a young continent with a ‘youth bulge’ and this holds in fact the key to its development potential and promises a rich demographic dividend.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, begs the question as to what we, as a Member State of the AU and with an African identity, can do or contribute to the rise of Africa. Our small size as compared to mainland Africa should not be seen as constraining and should not hold us back: even the smallest of countries can change the course of the future.

Let us see the win-win situation that arises from having more than 800 million African youth seeking further and higher education.

Mauritius, strategically located at the crossroads of Africa and the Indian Ocean, is uniquely positioned to serve as a higher education hub for the continent.

A number of factors speak for us:

- Our nation's commitment to educational excellence and innovation has since long been recognized.
- We have invested significantly in creating a robust educational infrastructure that meets international standards.
- Our higher education institutions are equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, and our wide range of curricula are so designed as to also

foster critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability. These programs are designed to be both rigorous and relevant, ensuring that our graduates are well prepared to meet the challenges of the global workforce.

Increasingly, international students are choosing Mauritius as their destination for higher education. Currently, 50% of our international students come from Africa, a number we expect to increase multi-fold in the coming years.

In addition, since 2013, Mauritius has been offering some 50 scholarships to African citizens and residents of member states of the African Union through the Mauritius to Africa Scholarship Scheme. This scheme has been enhanced over the years to align these scholarships with the needs of African students. From a purely undergraduate level, the scheme has gradually opened up for Master's programs, then MPhil/PhD programs, before creating further openings for TVET Certificate and Diploma courses in any public institution, including Polytechnics Mauritius Limited.

To date, we have trained more than 150 African students who are now professionals in their own countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I said at the beginning of my address, the theme chosen for Africa Day 2024 focuses on Education, more precisely on *Building Resilient Education Systems* which, I repeat, is both timely and urgent for our Continent. This provides the the platform, the opportunity for us to look at how far we have come in our own endeavours to make our own education system resilient.

First, let us acknowledge the significant strides that Mauritius has taken in the domain of education. Our commitment to promoting and implementing a world-class education system has been unwavering. From primary to tertiary education, we have continually sought to enhance the quality and accessibility of education for all our learners. This commitment is reflected in our numerous educational reforms, investments in infrastructure, and the continuous professional development of our educators, among other policy measures.

Inclusive education lies at the heart of our vision for the future. Our education system is designed to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners, including those with disabilities, and those coming from vulnerable communities. The goal of gender equality in the learning system has been generally met, especially since it is not just a moral imperative, but also as a catalyst for economic growth and social development.

Moreover, one not-to-be-overlooked building block of our educational strategy has been the integration of EdTech in the classroom. Digital literacy is a critical life skill for the 21st century, and we have made significant investments in ensuring that our students are well-equipped to navigate the digital world. From providing access to digital learning resources to training teachers in the use of technology, we are creating a modern, tech-savvy learning environment that prepares our students for the future.

In this context, it is important to face the new reality created by rapid advancements in technology, artificial intelligence, and automation. There is no question of holding them back. These are already transforming industries and redefining the skills required for the workforce of tomorrow. The burden of proof lies upon the education system to equip our students with not only the relevant technical and soft skills but also to future-proof them against a dynamic and interconnected world.

This also explains why technical and higher technical education has not been put on a backburner. Quite the contrary! We have a number of success stories now being told in this domain.

Ladies and gentlemen,

All things considered, building resilient education systems is a collective responsibility. They require the concerted efforts of governments, educational institutions, the private sector, and civil society.

If I may be allowed to extrapolate, only active and dynamic collaboration and partnerships can help create an environment where every African learner has the opportunity to access quality education, regardless of their socio-economic background or gender. This calls for innovative approaches to education

financing, leveraging technology to bridge gaps in access, and fostering a culture of lifelong learning. Such collaboration is also at the intercountry level. Illustratively at the behest of the ADEA, Polytechnics Mauritius Ltd was instrumental in coming up with a bench mark tool kit for the TVET Sector. **This tool kit served as guidance for AU member states, to increase their resilience through remote learning resilience.**

Reflecting further, as we strive to build resilient education systems, we must also recognise the importance of cultural heritage and identity. I am pleased to note that, in most parts of the continent this is becoming a reality. Indeed, our education systems should celebrate and preserve our rich cultural diversity, instilling a sense of pride and belonging in our students. A sense of unity and solidarity among Africans can prove to be the best antidote to social unrests and instability and thus essential for our collective progress.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mauritius stands ready to collaborate with our African brothers and sisters, to share best practices, knowledge, and resources. We are committed to playing our part in the African Union's Agenda 2063, which envisions a prosperous and integrated Africa driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena.

Education is the cornerstone of this vision, and we must invest in our people to realise it.

In conclusion, let us seize the opportunity of this Africa Day to reaffirm our commitment to educating an African more than ready for the 21st century. Let us work together to build resilient education systems that provide increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning for all.

Together, we can create a brighter future for our continent, where every African can reach their full potential and contribute to the prosperity and well-being of our nations. Let us move forward with determination, unity, and a shared vision for a better Africa.

Happy Africa Day 2024 to all of you