

**Address of Hon VPM
Award Ceremony for “Interpersonal Communication and Peer Counselling
Skills” Workshop EDUTAINMENT
World Hindi Secretariat
04 April 2024**

**Miss Priscilla LI YING, ‘Head of Office’ of the United Nations Population Fund
in Mauritius and Seychelles**

Miss Sandrine VALERE, the Supervising Officer of My Ministry;

Permanent Secretaries,

The Chief Technical Officer,

Directors and members of the Administrative Cadre of My Ministry;

Educators and Senior Educators;

Dear Students.

Good Morning to you all

As we gather here today, at the dusk of the first term, I am thrilled at the recognition of the profound impact we can make when we work together towards a common goal. Education is universally recognised as not being solely confined to the boundaries of classrooms; rather, it extends into every aspect of our lives, shaping our values, beliefs, and actions.

Today, I am proud to watch the results of the fruitful collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Youth and the UNFPA, a collaboration that has as end-result, the capacity to address the critical social issues affecting our youngsters.

This partnership with the Ministry of Youth and UNFPA demonstrates our commitment to holistic education, to the Whole-Person development, one that not only nurtures academic excellence but also fosters social and emotional well-being as well as resilience.

I eagerly look forward to this continued relationship for future development-centric projects that have the well-being of our young people at heart.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are gathered here today for this Award Ceremony not as an end, but a means to achieve the consolidation competencies of young

students of Grade 12, with a view to provide supportive listening to their peers and to empower Educators of the Student Care and Counselling Desk (SCCD) in providing scaffolding for students. I wholeheartedly thank you for your participation in the Workshops during the previous years. Congratulations to all of you, our highly dynamic youth who have proved to be highly generous with your time.

You, our youth, are the future leaders, innovators and change-makers of tomorrow. But because you are on the rising side of a learning curve, it is our collective responsibility to provide you with the support and guidance you need to thrive in an ever-changing world.

You will all agree, ladies and gentlemen, that, in this rapidly evolving world, one of the most pressing issues facing our youth, today is Mental Health. Indeed, the pressures of academic performance, the high and sometimes unrealistic social expectations, and personal challenges can take a toll on their well-being. That is why I am committed to all such initiatives that have as goal to promote mental health awareness, that provide access to counselling services, and particularly destigmatize conversations around mental illness.

We cannot and should not ignore the alarming rise in social issues such as suicide, teenage pregnancies, bullying, drug use, parental neglect, and delinquency. These societal issues not only impact individual lives but also undermine the very fabric of our society. It is imperative therefore that we address them with urgency but also with compassion.

This is why I am convinced that the collaborative efforts of one and all will be conducive to the continued implementation of comprehensive programs focused on prevention, intervention, and support. These programs will involve education, outreach, community engagement, and access to resources aimed at empowering our youth to make informed choices and seek help when needed.

But obviously, our work does not and cannot end there.

It is incumbent upon us to also create safe and inclusive learning environments where students feel respected, supported, and valued. This requires a concerted effort to combat bullying, discrimination, and harassment in all its forms. We have

taken and will continue to take measures in that direction. But it is also true that, by promoting empathy, understanding, and acceptance, we can build a culture of kindness and mutual respect within our schools and, by extension, our communities.

I accordingly stand before you today, sharing a vision I constantly refer to: I want to see our educational community so empowered as to foster not only academic excellence but also holistic growth and well-being. Let me reiterate that the unfurling of this vision extends beyond textbooks and classrooms; it goes even beyond the confines of traditional curriculum. Facilitating learners' capacity to navigate the complexities of life should logically encompass the development of essential life skills and the nurturing of a supportive environment where every individual feels valued and heard.

Let me labour the point.

One tool to make this a reality is the development of a set of competencies among our students, including their ability to provide empathetic support and guidance to their peers. We recognize the immense value of peer-to-peer interactions in fostering a sense of belonging and emotional well-being among students. Therefore, I urge each and every one of you to cultivate a culture of supportive listening within your classrooms and school communities. Encourage empathy, kindness, and understanding among your peers, for it is through these connections that we can truly make a difference in each other's lives. Peer Counselling programs have been shown to provide emotional support, promote positive changes in behaviour, and strengthen interpersonal relationships among students. By harnessing the power of peer connections, we can create a network of support that extends beyond the classroom walls.

And this where the Student Care and Counselling Desk gets into the picture. I am pleased that this Desk has missioned itself to provide additional support to students who may be facing challenges or in need of guidance. The end-result is obvious: by establishing dedicated spaces for students to seek assistance, we are reinforcing our commitment to their well-being and creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

But my Ministry is the first to recognise that our efforts cannot stop there. It is essential that we also invest in the training and professional development of our Educators to effectively support students through the Student Care and Counselling Desk. It is my firm conviction that we must equip our teachers with the skills and resources necessary to scaffold students' emotional and social development, in addition to their academic growth.

Consolidating competencies among our students, empowering them to provide supportive listening to their peers, and training educators to effectively utilise the Student Care and Counselling Desk are essential steps towards creating a more compassionate and resilient educational community. Together, let us embrace this journey of growth and transformation, ensuring that every student feels valued, supported, and empowered to reach his or her full potential.

In conclusion, it is essential that Educators, parents, policymakers, community leaders, and most importantly, our youth - join hands in this vital endeavour. Together, we can create a brighter future for generations to come, one where every young person has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to our youth and their well-being.

And thank you all for your kind attention.