

UDM GRADUATION CEREMONY

TUESDAY 13 OCTOBER 2020

10.30HRS

**Speech of Hon Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, Vice-Prime Minister,
Minister of Education, Tertiary Education,
Science and Technology**

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very Good morning to you all.

I feel deeply honoured to be in your midst to-day for this Graduation Ceremony – a long awaited and important event organized by the Université Des Mascareignes for its graduands. May I, here, convey my thanks and appreciation to the Board and Management of the University for the invitation extended to me to attend today's event, and for giving me the opportunity to address you, the new batch of graduands.

We are fully aware of the significance that today's event holds in your life. I am sure it will be forever remembered, the moreso that it's your day today, and you should be proud of your achievement.

My congratulations go to you, your family and those who have helped you, in one way or the other, to be where you are today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, COVID-19 has become such a haunting presence that we simply cannot avoid a mention of it—sometimes more than a mere mention, in fact!

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted, as you probably have read and seen, in most universities graduation ceremonies around the world veering away from an in-presence ceremonials to virtual ceremonies, drive-in ceremonies and such other alternative ceremonies. Of course, that means less ceremonial splendour. Many students graduating, this year, will not be able to experience this incredibly memorable moment of standing in front of their peers and lecturers to receive their certificates, wearing the graduation gowns and hats.

So, in a way you are lucky, **graduands**, that you are physically present, to-day, as our beloved country has not been registering any local community transmission of the Coronavirus for more than four months. So, let us celebrate **Your day**. You deserve it, and to-day is the culmination of months and years of hard work and sacrifices. And, time has come for every one of you, **graduands**, to be awarded a degree or a diploma.

But remember, with qualifications come new responsibilities.

For all I know, some of you would wish to pursue further your studies, and even engage in research.

Good choice!

The higher the qualifications, the greater the chances for a felicitous livelihood. And where research is concerned, the first five students who, today, will be awarded their PhDs and whom I warmly congratulate, will tell you that the ultimate purpose of research remains to solve real life problems and improve the life of people. Yes, this country needs bespoke and contextually relevant knowledge that enables decisions at policy level.

Yet, others among you will now take their first steps into the world of work. I am sure you have already latched on mentally to a career path. However, in our modern times, it is important to keep in view that career paths do not have to last forever. With time, your interests and your skills will evolve and you will wish to seek new avenues.

One piece of advice to you, if I may: be open to change. Don't be afraid to try something new. Be agile and flexible.

Innovate!

The context demands this today. COVID-19 has given rise to a lot of trauma and fatalities. It has placed economies in a tailspin. However, we must also recognize the silver lining it has brought.

Let me take just two examples.

One, obviously, is from the domain of Education.

At primary and secondary levels, **Ladies and Gentlemen**, the pandemic precipitated the onset of remote learning. Overnight, Educators, though not formally trained, hit the ground

running and started resorting to digital means to ensure their learners underwent no learning loss. At the tertiary level, too, as you know, online learning was given an even greater accelerated thrust.

The pandemic thus stressed the necessity for alternative approaches to learning.

This is also the case for my second example.

Graduands,

The economic model as we have known it so far is now being questioned. The new narrative blindingly spotlights a change in economic model.

One of its immediately visible manifestations has been the institutionalization of the “work- from-home” model that itself demands adjustment and a new mindset. Again, under this new model, with mobility being restricted, workers will keep thinking globally while working locally and collaborating with fellow workers from several geographical locations.

You will have noticed how some manufacturing entities have had to readjust and reinvent themselves in this world of uncertainty. Simple case in point: remember how some of these, through lack of orders for textile clothing due to lockdown, recycled themselves into the production of protective equipment like masks.

I am sure you will have noticed also the shift from cash to digital payments, to contactless payment, that is now becoming current in Mauritius! I am not surprised to hear

that, in the UK, for instance, the use of ATM has plunged by more than fifty percent!

That is precisely why I referred to the need for you to develop agility and flexibility earlier. Add to these, scalability and resilience, since these are the watchwords announcing our new economic era.

So ask yourselves, **Dear Graduands**, the question: *Will you be able to cope if you are suddenly thrown into the deep end of the pool? How agile and resilient do you really feel you are?*

Because the world hasn't done with crises yet! We need to brace ourselves for future shocks.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If we believe that there is a necessity and an undeniable quest for a systemic rethinking and re-engineering, we must remember that this applies to our Universities as well. We are living in a world where norms are constantly crumbling, including norms for higher education and university administration.

If we look at the international higher education landscape, we note that many universities are not enrolling students, including foreign students, for the moment as they are waiting for the situation to return to normal.

Now, there are many questions today which require reflection. We want to be an education hub. We want to internationalise our higher education. In the light of the new configuration, it becomes imperative to rethink the academic, financial and admission models and consider and create new ones. We

must adjust to the new normal if we want to succeed and not wait for the situation to be as it was, pre-COVID. We are on the brink of the post-COVID era and we need to forge ahead with confidence and hope.

Change, ***Ladies and Gentlemen***, is hard to imagine and even harder to implement. But the pandemic has compelled us to adopt a new mindset in our endeavor to succeed on every front. Likewise, our higher education institutions have to re-examine their day to day functions and re-invent themselves.

And let's keep in view that re-entering a post-COVID-19 world will certainly not be done in isolation but in collaboration. A collaborative approach at every level, in the present situation, is the order of the day

Indeed, today we need increasingly to replace competition with collaboration. In every international forum, the narrative is about collaboration between countries, open science and open data. We have again, thanks to COVID-19, if I may say so, realized that we can come out of our problems through sharing and the expression of real solidarity. *'Il y a toujours une lumière au bout du tunnel'* as goes the saying!

And that, again, is one of the responsibilities that universities are called upon to shoulder. I know, ***Dear Graduands***, that your *alma mater* has strengthened its ties with Industry. In fact, the University-Industry nexus is growing stronger by the day, with Industry being actively involved in the development of the University programmes and also in mentoring the students during their industrial placements. This has obviously been one major contributory factor towards the high

employability of graduates from the Université des Mascareignes.

It now becomes strategically important for all our higher education institutions to prepare their students for future challenges. In this context, it becomes relevant to share the results of a very recent survey. I am referring here to the **QS EMPLOYER INSIGHTS Report** that came out in Sept 2020 in the wake of a survey of employers. The results reflect once again the huge value the world of work continues to attach to the soft skills or, preferably, the people skills.

Thus, Communication, problem solving, and teamwork were identified as the skills of most importance. These were followed by flexibility.

I believe it continues to make sense that both graduates as well as our Universities keep that dimension in view to guarantee the future employability of our human resources.

Dear Graduands, Whenever the opportunity of a Graduation Ceremony presents itself, there is always one advice that I allow myself to give to the bright minds I see patiently waiting for the award of their diplomas and degrees. And that has to do with a value-adding element, *ce qu'on appelle le "plus-value" en francais*.

There is no harm in seeking to be on top of things—there is no harm in striving for excellence and being recognized as the cream of the crop, *"la crème de la crème."* You do become a role model, a source of inspiration, for others around you. However, the most important quality by which you will be judged will ultimately be something else—your sense of

humility, the value of recognizing that knowledge has to be accompanied by wisdom.

Remember always to be humble in your success, to be altruistic in your thoughts and to be compassionate in your actions. You will be judged not only by your capacity to deliver but also for your understanding of and respect for your fellow men and women, as well as your compassion for the underprivileged.

And most significantly, make sure that you tread on the path of righteousness, and rest content only when you will have made your life stand for something worthwhile.

Graduands,

Now that you will be conferred your degree, I am sure that you will become worthy ambassadors of this University and help shape a better tomorrow for yourselves, wherever you are and whatever you do.

On behalf of your parents, family and friends and the UDM academics and staff and in my own name, congratulations to all of you.

I now wish you go on to make your country proud of you!

Godspeed to all of you.

I thank you for your attention.