

**THE CENTRE DE LECTURE PUBLIQUE ET D'ANIMATION CULTURELLE  
BILL (No. II of 2009) (21/04/09)**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**The Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources**

**(Dr. V. Bunwaree):** Mr Speaker, Sir, the purpose of the Bill is to set up the 'Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle' (CELPAC) in order to encourage and promote reading through artistic, cultural and educational activities especially among those persons for whom access to reading activities is practically inexistent.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 1994 and 1997 my Ministry signed two Conventions with *the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) formerly known as the *Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique* (ACCT) to set up a network of *Centre de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle* known as CLAC in the rural areas in Mauritius and Rodrigues with a view to providing library facilities, promoting cultural activities and sensitising the population on a wide array of topics and themes of common interest and also on the ills affecting the society. The cultural activities include conferences, theatrical and musical performances, training sessions in drawing and painting as well as workshops on literacy and story telling.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the CLAC project which started in 1994 has now a network of 16 units -12 in Mauritius namely at Rivière du Rempart, Grand' Baie, Triolet, Montagne Longue, Saint-Pierre, Bel-Air, Mahebourg, Chemin Grenier, Grand Bois, Abercrombie, Cottage, and Petite Rivière and four in Rodrigues at Grand Montagne, Malabar, Rivière Coco, et La Ferme. Apart from cultural activities, the CLAC units place at the disposal of CLAC users a wide range of books, magazines, and newspapers. The public response has been very good and it is even envisaged to extend the network to other remote areas.

The CLAC project receives support in the form of reading materials, equipment and part funding from the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* while the Mauritian side provides premises, human resources, logistics and funding for artistic and cultural activities. The CLAC is being managed on a cost-sharing basis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the 12 CLAC in Mauritius operate in buildings placed at our disposal by: the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions, the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare, the Pamplemousses/Rivière du Rempart and the Black River District Councils and the four in Rodrigues within the premises of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. The centres are operated by staff of my Ministry, the Sugar Industry Welfare Fund, the Black River District Council and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

These centres are responding to the literary needs of the inhabitants of the rural communities. Each CLAC is equipped with a collection of more than 3000 books and these are issued continuously with newspapers and magazines. Cultural activities are organised either within CLAC premises or in space provided by the other supporting Ministries and District Councils. The CLAC project has been very successful. Just as an indication, the number of subscribers and users have, on an average, increased by almost four-fold in a span of five years. This is a positive signal as there is a perception that Mauritians read less.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2007 the OIF, informed of the imminent termination of the CLAC programme and proposed to integrate Mauritius within its programme '*Appui aux Politiques Nationales de lecture Publique*' requiring the CLAC to be converted into a new structure, namely the *Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle* (CELPAC).

This proposal of the OIF was made in view of its satisfaction with the performance of CLAC in Mauritius. In this context, the OIF has proposed to disburse an amount of euros 170,000, that is, around Rs8 m. over a period of three years to set up the new structure.

In addition the OIF also intends to equip the CELPAC with pedagogical tools such as computers, CDs, DVDs, games and cinema kits.

However, the proposals of the OIF was conditional to the new venture being operated by specific independent structure responsible for the promotion of public reading as is the case in other countries like Burkina Faso, Burundi, Haiti, Lebanon, Madagascar and Mauritania. According to the OIF, CELPAC is an improved tool for the promotion of grassroot level. The culture of reading will thus be given a new boost.

To give effect to the new proposal from the OIF for the integration of Mauritius in its new public reading programme, that is, '*Appui aux Politiques Nationales de Lecture Publique*', and to provide for the affairs of the new structure to be managed by an independent body, prerequisites of the OIF, it has become necessary to set up this new structure by way of an Act of Parliament.

Accordingly, Mr Speaker, Sir, in response to the requirements from the OIF, my Ministry has worked out the draft CELPAC Bill based on the model of the President's Fund for Creative Writing in English. With this proposed model, the CELPAC will be managed by a Committee established under an Act, instead of its management directly by my Ministry, as is presently the case. The personnel, logistics, and running costs will continue to be provided by the same public authorities. Additionally, besides receiving donations and grants from the OIF, the CELPAC will be in a position to tap other

sources.

Coming to the Bill itself, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to point out that its main provisions focus on the objects of CELPAC, namely –

- (i) make reading materials easily accessible to the public;
- (ii) encourage and promote reading, and
- (iii) organise artistic, cultural and educational activities

In order to fulfill its objects effectively, the CELPAC will, besides reading materials, also lend audiovisuals to its subscribers. Moreover, the CELPAC network will gradually be extended by the opening of new centres both in Mauritius and Rodrigues. Activities such as lectures, seminars and conferences in artistic, cultural and educational fields will continue to be included in the programme of CELPAC. CELPAC will maintain its collaboration with the OIF and cooperate and establish links with other institutions having similar objects to those of CELPAC.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill provides for the CELPAC to fix and levy fees or charges and raise funds and incur expenditure.

The CELPAC will be managed by a committee comprising a Chairperson, representatives from my Ministry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, the Ministry of Local Government, Rodrigues and the Outer Islands, the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions, the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare, the National Library, L'*Alliance Française*, a local writer and a person having experience in matters related to artistic creativity and cultural events.

Mr Speaker, Sir, presently the personnel of CLAC units work under the supervision of an Adviser, Mrs Chasle, who is the *Responsable Nationale* and a Culture Officer acting as the CLAC Coordinator. Given that the running of the CLAC programme has been a success, the present arrangements in terms of personnel will be maintained. The set-up will further be straightened with the coming into force of the CELPAC.

In fact, the legislation provides for the Supervising Officer of my Ministry to designate a public officer to be the Officer in Charge of CELPAC and such number of public officers as the committee may require in the performance of its functions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, once the CELPAC Bill is passed, a new Convention will be signed between the OIF and my Ministry for the implementation of this new venture.

This Government Mr Speaker, Sir, is perfectly aware of the importance of inculcating reading habits in the Mauritian population and has thus committed itself vis-à-vis the OIF to enact the CELPAC legislation. Government considers reading an important skill that needs to be developed particularly in children because it fuels their imagination, encourages quick learning, widens their views, expands their horizons and stimulates their curiosity. It is therefore imperative for children to know that reading is not only essential for survival in the world of schools and universities, but in adult life as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, reading should be viewed as a pleasurable activity, which expose people to a wide range of vocabulary and opportunities like developing one's self confidence and public speaking skills.

Moreover, as children tend to imitate the world around them, carefully chosen stories and books not only have a position influence on them but also sensitise them to cater for the needs of others. For example, books can encourage children to develop moral values such as being more cooperative, sharing with others, being kind to people and animals or respecting the environment.

Reading can also enhance children's social skills. Although reading is essentially pictured as a solitary activity, in certain circumstances reading can be a socialising activity. For example, a parent or grandparent reading a story aloud, can be a great opportunity for adult and child to share some quiet and relaxed quality time together, away from the rush and stresses of the business of daily living. They can spend a few minutes of precious time by sharing ideas that are contained in the story.

Parents need to inspire their children to read. There are so many ways in which reading can be an important source of knowledge and pleasure that can last a lifetime. This desire to read should at all times be nurtured in children.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, despite all the advantages that reading brings, yet it is unfortunate that today's generation seem to prefer the digital culture to the writing and reading culture. Nowadays it is a pity that children spend more time watching television, browsing the net, downloading games or films, text messaging and on audio and e-books. Research has shown that there is a decline in reading habits among the youngsters. This has led most children with learning disabilities to have problems with reading and related language skills. Children with poor reading skills end up receiving poor grades, get easily distracted and frustrated, have behaviour problems, seem to dislike school and often fail to develop to their full potentials. Our children need help to develop the ability to read so that they can comprehend subjects better at school.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is why Government is laying much emphasis to boost up

reading habits in the Mauritian population. The CELPAC, like the CLAC, will continue to play a crucial role in carrying out an aggressive campaign to motivate people and students from all corners of Mauritius, particularly the rural areas to make optimum use of CELPAC. Just as the CLAC, the CELPAC will continue to be stuffed with a whole gamut of reading materials such as books, magazines, *bandes dessinées* and audiovisuals that will suit the tastes of one and all. The magic of reading opens up a whole wonderful world full of literature where adults and children can enjoy side by side.

The aim of the Government is to instill in the population, particularly the most vulnerable groups of the society, a sense of discovering pleasure in reading and widen their knowledge in different fields.

My Ministry with the collaboration of the Early Childhood Care and Educational Authority has initiated a programme specifically to sensitise kids of preprimary

schools on the importance of reading. This will help bridging the gap between the levels of pre-primary and primary schools children.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to boosting up reading habits among primary level students, the CELPAC will be called upon to organise training workshop with primary school teachers and Parent Teachers Associations found in the CELPAC vicinity, with a view to sensitising them on the benefits of a reading culture and to show to them how to arouse the interest of a child to read through the organisation of a cultural activity.

As such, Mr Speaker, Sir, CELPAC will continue to organise cultural activities at their respective centres –

- to mark important events such as National Day, Abolition of Slavery, Christmas, *Journée de la Francophonie*, World Theatre Day, World Book Day, *Fête du Pain*, Dance Day and Music Day,
- to hold talks on important subjects such as *la Francophonie*, the Lomé Convention, the ACP and SADC groups of countries;
- to sensitise the population on social problems affecting the society like negative effects of smoking and taking illicit drugs, health problems such as SIDA;
- to hold exhibitions on the lives and achievements of important personalities like Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and
- to organise various types of competition such as reading poem, painting, song, dance and quiz.

The OIF lays emphasis on the holding of cultural activities as it helps to attract a great number of people towards the reading centres. Apart from enjoying the show, the inhabitants are invited to effect a guided visit of the centre to sensitise them on its aims and objectives. In so doing, the centres welcome new adherents while retaining the existing ones.

M. le président si vous permettez, j'ajouterais maintenant quelques mots en français.

L'Organisation Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie (OIF), qui vient de fêter ses 36 ans, a, comme objectif principal, la promotion de la langue française dans les 63 états et gouvernements qui constituent son espace géographique.

La francophonie qui se veut un espace de partage culturel a pour but de préserver et promouvoir la diversité culturelle dans tout l'espace francophone. Je dois souligner que le projet CLAC à Maurice a rencontré un grand succès grâce à l'appui de l'OIF. Je tiens à remercier l'OIF pour son soutien au programme CLAC et aussi son apport dans l'implantation de la nouvelle structure CELPAC et sa dotation en termes d'équipements et de financements.

Le CELPAC, M. le président, offre un éventail de services propres à promouvoir le plaisir de lire à travers un fonds important d'ouvrages soigneusement sélectionnés par les services de l'OIF (encyclopédies, dictionnaires, romans jeunes et romans adultes, bandes dessinées pour jeunes enfants et adolescents, livres éducatifs et ouvrages de références tels que livre de cuisine, de couture, de jardinage, etc). Complémentairement, car, bien sur, rien ne saurait remplacer l'objet-livre, CELPAC offre des services propres à promouvoir le plaisir de lire à travers des animations culturelles autour du livre. Ces animations sont ponctuelles et ont pour but d'attirer des lecteurs potentiels et de garder ceux déjà inscrits ; elles sont d'une grande importance et très appréciées de la population.

Comme vous le savez, M. le président, la lecture est la clef du développement humain. Elle stimule et renforce notre pensée et doit être pratiquée dès la petite enfance.

Ainsi, dès son plus jeune âge l'enfant exposé à la lecture trouvera dans les fables, contes et légendes racontés à voix haute par ses parents, ses proches et ses enseignants des valeurs morales qui stimuleront son imagination et lui permettront de devenir un citoyen à part entière.

M. le président, je souhaiterais terminer mon discours en citant Jean de La Bruyère, un grand penseur et écrivain français du 17<sup>ème</sup> siècle.  
Je cite –

‘Quand une lecture vous élève l'esprit, et qu'elle vous inspire des sentiments nobles et courageux, ne cherchez pas une autre règle pour juger l'ouvrage ; il est bon, et fait de main d'ouvrier’.

With these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I commend the Bill to the House.

**Mr Faugoo rose and seconded.**

**(5.20 p.m.)**

**Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE):** Mr Speaker, Sir, we all agree that we must encourage reading in the country. We all agree that from the very early childhood, we must encourage preprimary children to read books, novels, poems. When the Minister was introducing the Bill, he said that the CELPAC, that is, the Bill, which is in front of the House, was a recommendation made by the OIF in the year 2007, whereby we had some 170,000 euros, that is, Rs8 m. which will be spent over the three coming years towards the conversion of the existing CLAC into a structured organisation, that is, the CELPAC. But I am afraid, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we have been a bit slow in this endeavour. Let me remind the Minister that when he mentioned year 2007, there was a Cabinet decision on 15 December 2006 - nearly two years ago - wherein it was clearly stated that Cabinet has taken note that the CLAC would be converted into the *Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle* following a recommendation by the OIF, initiator of the CLAC project. In the communiqué of 15 December 2006, it was said –

“As the project is being phased out, and in view of the satisfaction expressed by OIF on the status of the project in Mauritius, the OIF has proposed to integrate Mauritius within the countries benefiting from its programme “*Appui aux Politiques Nationales de Lecture Publique*”.

These 170,000 euros would be spent over a three-year period and would be operated by a specific structure. The communiqué of the Cabinet even stated that among other countries that will benefit, there were Burkina Faso, Burundi, Haïti, Lebanon, Madagascar and Mauritania. Therefore it is good, even though we are late by so many years, that now we are coming with this Bill to convert the CLAC into CELPAC with a structured organization. Later on I will talk about the composition of the Board, whether it is a good thing to have a Board of only civil servants when we are talking of bringing reading towards the people in the rural areas. But before I go further, I see that the objectives of CELPAC are more or less the same objectives that CLAC project had. But

I don't understand why one of the objectives, which was in CLAC, does not appear in the Bill. The objective reads thus –

“to provide facilities for the development of the rural community in the fields of education, health, technology, literature, etc.”

The Minister, himself, said - I heard him well - that CELPAC will organise talks, lectures, seminars on themes like HIV and AIDS, on health and technology issues. This was one of the objectives in CLAC, which I do not see in this Bill. When we see the

objects of CELPAC, this has been deleted completely despite the fact that the Minister said that it would deal with the sensitization programme of the population on health problems.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have one staff, and we have been told that most of the CLAC centres are found in social centres, but we know also that social centres are not that conducive to reading. We have quite a good number of activities going on around; there are people going in and out in these centres, and therefore it is not so conducive to reading. These CLAC centres have remained, for a number of years, as the Gian Nath Computer Centre. It was a good idea to have introduced it. But it has taken more time to make it operational. Therefore, as far as CELPAC is concerned, we must give a proper training to the people who are working there. We must think about providing appropriate buildings. Money has to be set aside for appropriate buildings in rural areas. And I think we must take on board the local authorities and the district councils, which can provide assistance to the CELPAC Board in providing appropriate buildings, which are conducive to reading, activities dedicated only to CELPAC. As it is now, all sorts of activities are carried out in these CLAC centres during the whole day. I think we must take on board the district councils, which can provide assistance in this field.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has said that more CELPAC centres will be set up in several areas. We must think of those really deprived areas where people do not have the means to travel long distances. The Ministry of Finance, in its eradication of absolute poverty programme, has identified, in its 229 areas where deprived people live. The officers operating these centres should move towards these people. While organising cultural and educational activities, they must go towards these people. Instead of the people coming in the centres, I think there is a need for CELPAC to be more proactive; they should go towards these underprivileged areas, where there are poor people who do not have the means to travel in order to go to these centres. The Minister has said that there has been an increase, but he has not given the figures as to how many adults, teenagers, young children regularly go to these centres. For example, if we see in Madagascar - I went on the web to see how CLAC is operating there - in the year 2007, 250,000 people benefited from the CLAC activities there. In Niger, 3,500 women and children living in underprivileged villages benefited from the activities of CLAC centres.

The Minister did not give the number of people - if he has the statistics on a yearly basis - young, adults, children who go to these CLAC centres. We must be more proactive and set up these CLAC centres in the deprived rural areas. We must also take on board the different NGOs because you have good NGOs in rural areas willing to work for the advancement and the promotion of education, for the promotion of cultural activities. I think CELPAC should take them on board, should ask for their collaboration so as to do good jobs. We have also the different cultural centres that have been set up in Mauritius, namely, the Tamil Cultural Centre, the Telugu Cultural Centre, etc. We must work in



close collaboration with all these centres.

As far as the composition of the Board is concerned, I see representatives of different Ministries, but we don't have stakeholders, for example, the representatives of these cultural centres who can help in organising cultural activities, as one of the functions of CELPAC is to organise cultural activities. There is no representative from the Association of Professional Librarians who could have formed part of this Board

Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to benefit from the aid of the OIF,

I think it is high time that CLAC be converted into CELPAC. The Minister has said that CELPAC will set up more centres in rural areas, this is good. But we must make sure that we set up good centres, that we go towards the people mainly in deprived areas so as to encourage more reading. Throughout the country, but mainly in the rural areas, we can feel that there is a need for the setting up of such centres so as to encourage reading and to encourage people to participate in cultural activities. These days when there is nothing to do, people just get into all sorts of *fléaux*, like alcohol, drugs, etc. These centres, if used judiciously, I am sure, will eliminate these *fléaux* in our society.

Thank you.

(5.34 p.m.)

**Mr M. Peetumber (First Member of Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac):** Mr Speaker, Sir, I situate the CELPAC Bill in the context of democratisation in the field of education and culture. Similar to the construction of the junior secondary schools in the 70s, the decision to grant free secondary education in 1977 which was another step in the same direction and to round it off, the granting of free transport to the students community way back in 2005. I, for one, have got a very positive bent on mind where appreciation is due, where praise is due, I make it a point to place on record my appreciation and congratulations for the efforts that are being done to extend these reading facilities to the rural areas or to those areas where such facilities do not simply exist. So, of course, I'll seize this opportunity to congratulate the Minister for coming up with this measure and, in the same breath, all his close collaborators who have spared no efforts in taking decisions that go in the right direction to democratise this culture of reading, not as the Minister mentioned, as provided by CLAC in ten or twelve centres, but they are even more ambitious to extend these facilities in those areas where such facilities simply do not exist.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the objects of the *Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle* Bill are to encourage and promote reading especially where reading centres are practically non-existent, to make reading materials easily accessible to the public. I would

like to underscore the words ‘easily accessible to the public’ and to promote artistic, cultural and educational activities are indeed commendable ones. By creating a reading culture in every important centre of the country, Government is giving an important signal to the population to return to the basics. In an era of liberalisation and globalisation, our traditional way of life is threatened with erosion. We are leaving no stone unturned, Mr Speaker, Sir, to overcome this digital divide. Nevertheless, even within the framework of a society governed by information technology, the book remains and preserves its importance for its intrinsic virtues. There is a wealth of human intelligence that lies in man’s imagination, a word which is not heard very often nowadays; the imagination, which is enriched by reading has a creative energy, which construes new people, new emotions through fiction. The adolescence world must be made up of the real and the fanciful, the rationale and the supra rationale. Our schools must develop the taste for reading in our youth. It is not enough to feed our adolescents exclusively on a diet of knowledge meant to be examined. Our teachers must assume their role as leaders for character formation. Reading builds character, because it helps to have access to the best minds that have found the best course. However, Mr Speaker, Sir, reading can be beneficial to our adolescents in more ways than one, even from the examination point of view. To start with, reading consolidates language acquisition which is the *sine qua non* condition for success in our education system. Reading gives us the power to juggle with words, to express our emotions effectively, to give our ideas with precision and accuracy and to ventilate our thoughts powerfully. These are the qualities that the examiners look for in the answers of students. Besides, to secure maturity, to acquire wisdom, to gain knowledge, to keep abreast of the ways of the world, to understand human nature, to come to grips with the complexities of life, we cannot depend exclusively upon our first-hand experiences.

This is so, because our life span of say 60/70 years will be too short a period of time to accumulate first-hand experiences relating to all kinds of situations people are normally confronted with in life. It is equally impossible to acquaint ourselves, through first-hand experiences, with brave warriors, eminent statesmen, renowned social reformers, astute politicians, reputed economists, mighty kings, celebrated scientists, inspired researchers and the like. Such characters are more often than not, Mr Speaker, Sir, outside the range of our daily experiences. So, we must necessarily resort to vicarious experience. What is vicarious experience? It is learning through the experience of others. In this case, it is learning through the experience of the authors, the playwrights, the columnists, the critics, the caricaturists who, in many cases, symbolise the loftiest minds with the most elevated thoughts. So, exposure to a whole gamut of characters from various walks of life and to complex life situations, depicted in works of literature can only enhance our experience and wisdom and make us more alert and richer on the cultural plain. Stripped of such inter-actions and exposure, we may be likened to the frog which, confined to the well since birth labours on the delusion that the well is the entire universe and that no life exists beyond the well. This is the limitation or the inadequacy of the frog, which suffers from a very restricted vision in view of the

claustrophobic world to which it has been confined since the start of its existence. What is true for the frog, Mr Speaker, Sir, can also be true to an extent for the individual who is totally cut off from the works of literature, from the world of books, newspapers and magazines.

Mr Speaker, Sir, pleasure, entertainment, amusement, excitement, thrill cannot be derived merely by watching a Liverpool, Manchester United, Chelsea or Arsenal Football Match nor by viewing Amitabh Bachan, Shahrukh Khan, Jim Carrey or Brad Pitt. It can well be achieved by reading Swift's 'Gulliver's Travels', Robert Greene's 'Power', Shiv Khera's 'No Freedom is Free' or 'You Can Win', Shakespeare's 'Macbeth', Milton's 'Paradise' or lightest stuff like Tintin, Oui-Oui, Les Quatre As, Lucky Luke, among others. Books, Mr Speaker, Sir, can be a source of real entertainment and pleasure. They can keep us away from a world of stress and strain and can be a real boon in our lives.

Mr Speaker, Sir, through this Bill, Government is linking up areas in Mauritius and Rodrigues where reading centres are non-existent. While poverty has always been treated from an economic angle and never from a cultural viewpoint, we are bridging another important gap to alleviate cultural poverty. We are attending to the cultural enrichment of those localities, which are cut off from the culturally more advanced parts of the country.

Let us understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, today, the think global and act local philosophy has given way to think local and act global attitude. We must be deeply rooted in our culture, but we should behave like citizens of the world, the universal or international men, someone who has transcended the barriers of ethnicity, geographical considerations or religious fanaticism. The *Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle* will create the link between the local and the global. This is the mark of cultural enrichment. Native culture is the lifeblood of our identity, but if we want to survive in today's globalised world, we cannot rest content with an ethnocentric or even national culture. Culture is that osmotic agent, which attracts congenial elements of different cultures, and transforms them to make them its own. Our Mauritian culture has absorbed many foreign cultural trades and yet it has not lost its intrinsic quintessential identity. The CELPAC will expose our culture to the francophone culture and, through it, to other cultures. We are better Mauritians, in spite of our exposure to our cultures; we have chosen to remain Mauritian.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would hasten to add, it is a beautiful thing that all these efforts have been put up by the Minister, the Ministry, the officials, the close collaborators. A lot of efforts have been invested into this exercise. It is important that all these efforts bear fruits. It is important that all the efforts that are put up to extend certain services to the general public, to the inhabitants of the rural areas, are executed in the sense that these services, these facilities are taken advantage of by the inhabitants who are targeted by this Bill. I understand that if these facilities are already there in the rural areas or in

those areas where they simply do not exist at the moment, if we do not resort to a sensitisation campaign, if we do not increase the awareness of the people that such facilities are there, and the people in question do not take advantage of these facilities, this will result in a waste: waste of human resources, waste of financial resources, waste of materials that will be needed to make these centres operational. A word of caution here; when all this is being done, it is equally important that we launch a sensitisation campaign to increase the awareness of the people regarding the existence of these facilities in those areas. Not only adolescents, not only school children, but, as the Minister rightly pointed out himself, these facilities must be extended to the population in general. We should not only encourage school children, the adolescents to improve their minds and bring about larger horizons. All the inhabitants, all the population should be encouraged to read and take the advantages that are put at their disposal. I understand that some kind of effort will be done in this direction, so that people who are targeted take advantage of these facilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, no place in Mauritius is so unimportant as not to find itself in the mainstream Mauritian culture. The Labour Party has been instrumental in bringing about an equitable progress at all levels in Mauritius, be it in terms of infrastructure, in the field of education or industrialisation, in all forms of progress; every little town or village has known advancement. The CELPAC adds yet another jewel to the crown. This is precisely why I congratulate the Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources and, by extension, the Prime Minister and the Government, for presenting the CELPAC Bill to this august Assembly.

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(17.50 p.m)

**Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands):** M. le président, le projet de loi qui nous est présenté aujourd'hui au Parlement, se situe, à mon humble avis, dans la juste logique de la continuité des choses.

Après le CLAC, le Centre de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle, qui a vu le jour dans les années 90, place maintenant au CELPAC, le Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle qui, à travers ce projet de loi, vise deux principaux objectifs. Le premier est celui d'encourager et de promouvoir les pratiques artistiques, culturelles et éducatives en créant au besoin les centres de lecture dans des endroits où ceux-ci n'existent pas.

Deuxièmement, initier et promouvoir la coopération avec des partenaires qui partagent ces mêmes objectifs, principalement ici, l'Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie.

Ce partenariat, avec l'OIF, M. le président, est révélateur de plusieurs choses, notamment de la considération dont jouit notre République au sein de cet organisme par rapport à la diffusion de la langue française, car si l'OIF a choisi d'aider notre pays, ce n'est certainement pas par hasard.

La popularité de la langue de Molière au sein de notre République, l'utilisation quotidienne et quasi-spontanée que nous en faisons, avec bien sûr des expressions et des locutions qui nous sont propres et propres à notre particularité insulaire et mauricienne, qui la rendent si attachante et si unique, sa présence presque tangible dans les mots de la langue créole largement inspirée – vous le conviendrez et tout le monde ici j'en suis sûr - du français, fait de notre peuple un vecteur privilégié de la diversité des expressions culturelles et de leur protection, telle que ratifiée par les pays membres de l'OIF à travers la Convention Internationale sur la protection et la promotion de la diversité des expressions culturelles entrée en vigueur le 18 mars 2007. Cette Convention prévoit en effet d'intégrer la culture dans le développement durable.

Or, quoi de mieux que la lecture pour propager la culture, M. le président? La lecture est non seulement un soutien efficace pour l'éducation d'un peuple, mais elle est aussi un des moyens les plus fructueux de conserver la mémoire du monde, de la propager, de la partager avec les autres. Elle ouvre la voie à l'égalité des chances dans un monde qui, malgré nos lois, en souffre cruellement.

Les vertus de la lecture, M. le président, ne peuvent être mises en doute. La lecture est à l'esprit ce que la nourriture est au corps. Quand elle est de bonne qualité, elle le nourrit, le fortifie, le rend apte à se surpasser. Lire permet aussi d'augmenter son vocabulaire, d'avoir plus d'aisance, de dialogue, d'entamer une conversation, de développer un esprit critique et d'analyse, et j'en passe. Pour toutes ces raisons, et pour bien d'autres, nous ne pouvons qu'approuver cette initiative qui vise à étendre les centres de lecture et d'animation culturelle à travers tout le pays.

Il serait en effet hypocrite de se voiler la face. De nos jours, il existe un grand nombre de personnes vivant dans notre société pour qui l'accès aux livres pour le plaisir demeure un luxe qu'ils ne peuvent se permettre. Des jeunes, pour qui la lecture, en dehors des livres de classe, est non pas interdite, mais, du moins, presque du domaine de l'inaccessible. D'abord, par rapport à son coût ; un bon livre de nos jours coûte cher. Vous n'êtes pas sans savoir que le prix des livres peut être très onéreux et, qu'avec la situation économique, les priorités de beaucoup de familles sont autres, mais aussi, et souvent également, par rapport à la difficulté d'accès aux centres de lecture publique qui se trouvent principalement en zones urbaines. Car, quoi qu'on le dise, M. le président, et je prends en cela ma propre circonscription comme exemple, il est difficile pour un habitant de Dubreuil, par exemple, de payer plus de R 80 pour un transport - un seul aller-retour - rien que pour se rendre à Curepipe et consulter un livre à la librairie Carnegie, bibliothèque pourtant ouverte à tous.

En ce sens, M. le président, le CELPAC viendra corriger une anomalie. A sa manière, le CLAC a accompli un très bon travail préliminaire. Dans les régions où il a été implanté – et le ministre l’a dit tout à l’heure - ce programme a connu un franc succès.

La lecture, mais aussi l’animation culturelle autour du livre suscitent un enthousiasme qui ne s’est jusqu’à présent, fort heureusement pas démenti. Ce n’est pas Mme Chasle, responsable nationale du CLAC, une des chevilles ouvrières de ce projet, dont le travail force l’admiration, que je tiens publiquement à féliciter, qui dira le contraire.

En effet, M. le président, les quelque trois milles livres de chaque centre du CLAC sont utilisés quotidiennement par les habitants des localités qui les abritent. Pour parodier Victor Hugo « On accomplit de délicieux voyages, embarqué sur un mot ». De même, les ouvrages disponibles au CLAC font chaque jour des heureux qui découvrent outre le plaisir de lire, tout un monde de connaissances.

Le livre est en cela un outil magique, un outil de liberté qui permet également une plus grande ouverture sur le monde du réel comme de l’imaginaire. Lire c’est être curieux. Et la curiosité ouvre les yeux sur tellement de choses. Chacune de nos lectures laisse une graine qui germe, disait Jules Renard. Et qui sait en quoi cette graine peut se transformer?

C’est pourquoi, M. le président, j’en viens à la clause 4 du projet de loi ci présenté qui veut encourager les activités artistiques, culturelles et éducationnelles à travers la lecture. Il serait bon, M. le président, que ces centres puissent également promouvoir non seulement la culture d’autres pays mais aussi des éléments locaux. En cela, je sous-entends la promotion d’auteurs mauriciens dont bon nombre écrivent en français, création qui va dans le sens de la promotion francophone et épouse parfaitement les objectifs de la Francophonie, un des principaux soutiens de ce projet. Je fais un appel en ce sens au ministre. Nous avons, à travers ce projet, une occasion unique de promouvoir les livres de nos auteurs locaux qui souffrent si cruellement de sous-exposition au palmarès des oeuvres littéraires. En cela, le CELPAC serait une opportunité non négligeable de consolider et de propager la réputation de nos auteurs sur notre propre sol et dans tous les coins et recoins de l’île. On pourrait imaginer encore mieux, qui sait ! Quand on a encore la capacité de rêver et les moyens de concrétiser le rêve, tout est possible. Cependant, M. le président, une autre interrogation me vient à l’esprit, notamment par rapport à la clause 10(1) de ce projet de loi qui stipule –

*“The Supervising Officer shall designate a public officer to be the officer in charge of the CELPAC”*

Dans cette phrase, c’est le mot ‘*designate*’ qui m’interpelle. M. le président, un projet tel que celui-ci, pour être mené à bien, doit être pris en charge par une personne qui possède bien sûr les qualifications requises pour cela. Il s’agit ici de mener à bien un projet qui

comprend la prise en charge quotidienne de nombreux centres, – le nombre n'est pas mentionné – et cela dépendra certainement du financement obtenu, mais il est fort à parier que, vu le nombre de régions qui ne compte aucune librairie publique, que ces centres peuvent être nombreux.

Or, nulle part dans la section 10, il n'est stipulé les qualifications et les compétences professionnelles de celui ou celle qui sera en charge de la politique quotidienne du CELPAC. Si on traite ce projet avec le sérieux qu'il mérite, pourquoi laisser ce choix à une désignation et non pas à une candidature ouverte, même si cette ouverture doit se limiter aux officiers de la fonction publique, avec des critères de qualifications et compétences bien définis ?

Nul doute que cette opportunité donnée à ceux qui se sentent aptes à diriger un projet de cette envergure serait un bon pas dans la consolidation de la foi en l'efficacité de la loi sur l'égalité des chances – *l'Equal Opportunities Act* - votée dans cette même Chambre il y a quelques mois de cela, et sur laquelle ont débattu un grand nombre de mes collègues présents aujourd'hui même dans cette Chambre.

Une désignation et la non définition de critères de sélection du candidat choisi reviendraient, M. le président, à concéder ou du moins à créer la perception que ce choix peut être réduit à une appréciation subjective, voire préférentielle d'un candidat au détriment d'un autre plus compétent qui n'aurait pas eu la chance de faire acte de candidature pour le poste. Il serait souhaitable, en ce sens, que cette clause soit revue afin d'ouvrir des possibilités au ministère, à travers le *Supervising Officer*, d'opter pour le meilleur candidat possible.

Pour conclure, M. le président, nous réitérerons ici notre soutien à ce projet. Comme tous les autres avant nous et comme nous l'avons dit, nous sommes en faveur de tout ce qui promeut le goût de la lecture, mais aussi son accessibilité auprès de la population mauricienne, du plus jeune au plus âgé. Espérons que nos suggestions, notamment par rapport aux auteurs mauriciens et à la désignation de la personne en charge du CELPAC, seront prises en considération.

Je vous remercie.

**Dr. Bunwaree:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like, first of all, at the outset of the summing-up speech, to thank the Members on both sides of the House for their contribution and, of course, for their keen interest and positive intervention on this Bill.

I am happy to note - as I was expecting, in fact - that unanimity has prevailed and how could it be otherwise on the necessity to accede to this request of the *Organisation Internationale De La Francophonie*, to convert the (CLAC) *Centre de Lecture et D'Animation Culturelle* into the (CELPAC) *Centre De Lecture Publique et D'animation*

*Culturelle* by way of this legislation.

I appreciate the cooperative spirit of hon. Members in this endeavour. Mr Speaker, Sir, all of us have felt the level of consciousness of Members, of the dire necessity to extent library facilities particularly in the rural areas of the country. This endeavour will not only encourage students from pre-primary to tertiary levels but also - as has been said by my friend, hon. Peetumber - the adult population to have access to different types of reading materials, to enhance the general knowledge; reading and writing skills and also to undertake research work. I am sure, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the enactment of *CELPAC*, coupled with - as you felt it from the speeches of hon. Members - a proper sensitisation campaign, it will boost up the reading capacity of our rural population essentially, but also the population in general I must say, to the extent that Mauritius can aspire to become a 100% literate island in the years ahead. Efforts will be optimised. The House can rely upon me to attract the public towards the library materials of each *CELPAC*, that is, books, reference materials, magazines, newspapers, *IT* and audio equipment as well.

To respond, Mr Speaker, Sir, to a few of the queries or questions put during the course of the speeches of hon. Members, I am fully aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we cannot have it all over the island. In fact, we are going to try to extend as far as possible, but there could be difficulties for people to have access to the centres. We are going to take this as one of the priorities when we decide where and how we are going to allow this *CELPAC* to be implanted and to operate. The question was raised I think by hon. Guinness about the social welfare centres not being conducive. We thought about it. In fact, people before me thought about it; they exist, either in social centres, in a separate corner or in a specific room. This is the way that those who have been responsible for the setting up these centres have tried to give them some possibilities to be conducive to reading. Of course, it is a question also of finding means to be able to do it. We will try to speak to the Local Authorities whenever possible, and try to improve whenever they are going to set up these and use these criteria to give the people a specific and appropriate place where reading is, in fact, more conducive.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think hon. Guinness spoke about the lateness in coming with this project, but I must say that, in fact, the structure proposed by the Mauritian Authorities to the *OIF* to give autonomy to *CELPAC* had to receive the agreement of the *OIF*. The *OIF* was more inclined at the beginning, for the setting up of a new parastatal body, which would have required much more funding. So, we had to take all of this into consideration; it is not a question of doing it on purpose, but we had to consider all this and when we were ready we did not lose time to come forward.

There was a question raised also by hon. Guinness about the number of users. I can give the figures - we got them. For the year 2007, there were 137,645 users and for the year 2008 there were 154,629 users. I said in the Second Reading of my speech that the number had increased within the last five years forefront. So, you get an idea. In fact, I



must congratulate Mrs Chasle who has been the responsible person. She has been working very actively and everybody is happy with what she's doing. In fact, she will continue to do the work with, of course, the new structure. I wish to take this opportunity to thank her and congratulate her as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a question of Board Membership also that has been raised. I must say that besides the Board, the *CLAC* is managed by a *comité de soutien*. I mentioned it very briefly in my speech just now - in fact, *CLAC's* works with the NGOs. We will be surprised to see the interaction of the NGOs and *forces vives* of the region wherever *CLAC* is implanted. We are going to continue with this close collaboration and it will be further strengthened. I will do all I can to make it as strong as possible and as interactive as possible.

The National Library, Mr Speaker, Sir, is represented on the Board. Insofar as cultural centres are concerned, the point was made, I think, by hon. Guinness. We have to agree that there are too many cultural centres for them to be represented individually or even by small groups. But the representative of the Ministry of Culture, in fact, covers the large spectrum and conveys the responsibility of cultural centres on the Board. The question of qualification or competence of the officer-in-charge was just raised by hon. Mrs Martin. She can rely upon us that we are going to find the most competent person. In fact, she has been so appreciative of Mrs Chasle. She can rely upon us that the work will continue in the same direction with the whole *CLAC* Board and the *comité de soutien* working together where people can deliver the goods.

Mr Speaker, Sir, insofar as training to officers of the centres is concerned, I must say that this is provided by the *Organisation Internationale De la Francophonie*. A senior official of this organisation comes to Mauritius quite occasionally for that specific purpose. Besides, the *Responsable Nationale* and the *CLAC* coordinator also provide training to the *CLAC* officers. And there also, it is a point that is very interesting and important and I would like to inform hon. Members that I will give my special attention to this question of training, because I really believe in it. There is also consultation with all stakeholders, staff, district council officers and others. There have been lots of discussions with them for the implementation of this Bill. We also want it to be a financially like structure. This is one of the reasons why we have come forward with the way it has been drafted and the presentation we have made.

*Before ending, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to say two things, one to correct a possible misinterpretation. We should not believe that CLAC, or CELPAC now, is going to cater only for the French Language. Cela est très important. Il faut savoir, qu'afin de respecter la diversité culturelle et linguistique de nos populations, et conformément au desiderata de l'OIF, elle-même, nos centres, outre un important éventail d'ouvrages en Français, offrent une sélection de livres dans toutes les langues pratiquées sur notre territoire, telles que l'Anglais, le Créole, le Mandarin, l'Urdu et l'Hindi. Bien entendu, il*

y a une concentration en Français parce qu'on est aidé par la Francophonie, mais ce n'est pas limité à la langue Française. Le nombre d'ouvrages, répertoriés dans les langues que je viens de mentionner, dépendent bien souvent du lectorat de l'endroit où se trouve implanter un CLAC. Par exemple, les livres d'Abercrombie ne seront pas les mêmes que ceux de Bel Air, ou ceux de St. Pierre. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous avons également un système de rotation des livres entre les différents centres. Ces ouvrages, M. le président, soigneusement sélectionnés, sont achetés par mon ministère qui dispose d'un budget mise à la disposition du CLAC, bientôt CELPAC, pour leur acquisition. Il s'agit principalement d'auteurs Mauriciens et on va continuer d'aller dans ce sens.

Je remercie l'honorable Madame Martin pour avoir fait le point en ce qui concerne les autres auteurs, Anglais et Américains, pour les ouvrages en Anglais. La Chambre peut compter sur le gouvernement pour faire la part belle aux auteurs locaux qu'on voudrait encourager autant que possible.

I think there is also the question of involving the education sector, which hon. Guinness has raised as a critical point. In fact, the thing is that education and culture are under the same Ministry now. First of all, the education system is taking on board cultural activities. The hon. Member himself is a teacher and educator, he must be knowing that there is, since the month of January this year, a renovation that has started in schools where there is an activity period for educators and all resourced persons to be called upon to go for co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, like theatre, music and art. In fact, arts and culture are being used as a medium to improve the level and standard of education in our schools. So, *CLAC* is going to be more - as has been mentioned by members - interactive with NGOs, *les forces vives* and the local population around the place where *CLAC* or *CELPAC* is implanted to give them more energy to work in that direction. The education will, of course, continue to go in the same line, as I have just mentioned. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure that the enactment of this Bill is going to be a good thing for education in general and reading in particular. I must make it very clear that in addition to library facilities, the cultural component will be maintained and further strengthened so as to encourage interaction in the community, as I have just mentioned. Insofar as the *comité de soutien* has been very helpful in providing the support in the organization of cultural activities in *CLAC* centres when it was existing until now, and the managing committee of *CELPAC* will see to it that this arrangement is consolidated as cultural events attract both readers and nonreaders of those who are unrolled at the *CLAC*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, competitions and initiation sessions will continue to be held to popularize games that will be available to *CELPAC*. Additionally, audiovisual materials, I repeat, I mentioned it at the beginning, would be another means to attract *CELPAC* users as these will provide to leisure, education, information and culture. Other ways to democratize information will also be through Internet and IT facilities. Nowadays, it is a natural evolution for all libraries to be equipped with such facilities and it will be ensured

that each *CELPAC* will be supplied with such equipment.

Last but not least Mr Speaker, Sir, the *CELPAC* will serve as a springboard for projects at community development. Information relating to health, education and environmental problems amongst others will continue to be disseminated to the public through its various centers existing and those which will be set up in the near future. This is yet, Mr Speaker, Sir, another vivid example to demonstrate the firm wish of the Government to facilitate access to reading materials to the most vulnerable groups of our society in particular. Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

Bill read a second time and committed

*The Centre de Lecture Publique et D'Animation Culturelle Bill (No. II of 2009) was considered and agreed to.*

*On the Assembly resuming with Mr Speaker in the Chair, Mr Speaker reported accordingly.*

*On motion made and seconded, the Centre de Lecture Publique et D'Animation Culturelle Bill (No. II of 2009) was read the third time and passed*