

SPEECH OF HON (MRS) L.D. DOOKUN-LUCHOOMUN
MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES,
TERTIARY EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RERSOURCES

“Get Connected” Certificate Award Ceremony

Rectors and Managers

Thank you for inviting me to be with you this afternoon. Certainly, this is an occasion that I would not wish to pass by since it is a recognition of the contribution of all of you who have engaged yourselves in the pilot phase of the “Get Connected” Programme.

The Certificate of Participation that you will now be presented with will serve to testify to your keenness to help to shape the school- based drug use prevention programme.

I accordingly extend my heartfelt congratulations to all of you, Awardees.

Of course, it goes without saying that I am deeply appreciative of the partnership that has been struck among the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Cim Group and my Ministry in driving this Programme.

I have always believed that actions have a high rate of implementation success when there is active collaboration at work.

So, let me commend both the UNODC and the Cim Group for their association in making our schools addiction free.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is now commonplace to state that drug abuse has a major negative impact on the very fabric of our society. The ill effects of drug use on the mind, body and spirit are

well-known. Yet, despite this realization, despite all evidence readily available, it is evident that drug addiction is reaching alarming proportions across the whole world.

Just consider the latest World Drug Report, released by UNODC in June this year.

We are told that, globally, the number of opioid users has risen to an estimated 53 million, up 56 per cent from previous estimates. Opioids are also held responsible for two thirds of the 585,000 people who died as a result of drug use in 2017.

Again, despite the tenacious efforts by the various stakeholders working in tandem to halt the social, medical and financial burden drug use results in, the Report highlights that some 35 million people are estimated to suffer from drug use disorders, thus requiring more intensive treatment services.

Mauritius is unfortunately not spared.

The social milieu of Mauritius is fast changing. On the one hand, we are faced with an erosion of our traditional values. At one time, the joint family system did exercise its own form of restraint, control and discipline. Such notions were in fact inherent in the family make up—but not necessarily true anymore today.

On the other hand, the introduction of drugs, including synthetic drugs, an offshoot of modernism, has added a new dimension to the problem.

I have always said this: I trust the youth. I know they have the capacity to work wonders for society. Their energy, their enthusiasm, when unleashed, can take society to new heights.

But there is always the Achilles' heel.

Young persons are impressionable. Also, in their quest for discovering and understanding the unknown, they are not always conversant with the “Cups and Ball” trickery. This explains why some of our younger generation are especially

susceptible to the menace of drugs. They are easily lured to drugs, whether for excitement or just out of curiosity. Again, it is common knowledge that strong peer pressure, the influence of the entertainment industry and misinformation about health risks tend to promote and encourage experimentation with illicit substances, thus fueling the addiction to drugs.

And that is typically true for all countries, developed and developing alike where youth are becoming the target of drug peddlers who have absolutely no consideration for the consequences of their actions.

However, whatever be the cause, our young people need to be made aware that they are engaging in risky health behaviors.

Ladies and gentlemen,

You all know that this Government is relentless in its determination to stem the tide of drug influx in Mauritius. Not a week passes by without our being informed of drug seizures that make a severe dent made in the armours of drug lords. Such severe blows are fully justified when the drug lords believe can enrich themselves to the detriment of our youth who are being “killed” socially, psychologically and even physically

And this is where schools have a major role to play.

Schools offer the most systematic and efficient way to reach a significant number of students. They are the perfect platform to mediate knowledge, skills and sound values in relation to health and drug use.

As you are all aware, my Ministry has underscored the importance of adopting a holistic approach in the implementation of the education reform.

“Get Connected” forms part of the holistic approach of the reform.

It uses a life skills concept model with the aim to delay tobacco, alcohol and drug initiation among adolescents. It not only summarizes all relevant knowledge on drug intake determinants and protective factors. It does more than that: It equally empowers the youth with social and life skills to become more resilient and resistant to drugs as well as sets the tone for them to becoming responsible adults.

Let me inform you all that, currently, a policy document for drug- free schools is under preparation. But we are also engaged in a series of other actions. Illustratively, only last week, a workshop was held with Rectors and Deputy Rectors on how to tackle violence and indiscipline in our schools—and that can also be drug-induced. I am waiting for them to come up with new and fine-tuned proposals.

On the other hand, we are equally concentrating a lot on what is called Social and Emotional Learning, (SEL), in the school environment. This is the means whereby learners acquire the skills and competences to manage their emotions, develop empathy with others and set and achieve positive goals.

I believe that, in a similar manner, the future rollout of Get Connected nationwide will be yet another manifestation of my Ministry's commitment to address this problem and take effective steps in that direction.

I hope that these efforts would eventually lead to an improvement of our school environment as well as create the platform, by extension, for the uplift of the entire social milieu.

I call upon all stakeholders to strive to address this problem in a holistic manner. Let it be the wellspring that will enable us to move further ahead towards a healthier and happier society.

On this note, let me once again congratulate the awardees and convey my sincere appreciation for their effort and commitment.

Such appreciation also goes to the Resource Persons who have undoubtedly done a great job.

Thank you for your kind attention.