

Speech of Hon. (Mrs.) Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun
Minister of Education & Human Resources
Tertiary Education and Scientific Research

Launching Ceremony
Young Mauritians' Plan for the Planet
Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre
27 February 2018

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Good Morning

It gives me great pleasure to be here in your midst today on the occasion of the launch of the innovative program **“Young Mauritians’ Plan for the Planet”** by the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre operating under the aegis of my Ministry.

Right at the outset, I must express my appreciation to HE, Ms Jenny Dee and her Team for facilitating a wide series of activities in conjunction with the Ministry, and this, in the context of the Australia Week. The High Commissioner has demonstrated, through her zeal and commitment, her unfailing efforts towards strengthening the already excellent bilateral relations that exist between our two countries.

Allow me also to extend a warm word of welcome to Mr. Ian Chambers from the Australian National University, the Director cum pioneering brain behind the **Young Persons Plan for the Planet** as well as Mrs Suzy Urbaniak, a recipient of the prestigious Best Teacher Award Prize in Australia.

Thank you Mr. Chambers and Mrs Urbaniak for enabling the incorporation of Mauritius into this project that has indeed been a huge success in Australia.

The **“Young Mauritians’ Plan for the Planet”** has been developed in partnership with the Australian National University and Questacon. It will also be my privilege to flag off the global launch of the Young Persons’ Plan for the Planet that is being run concurrently in Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, Fiji, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa and elsewhere.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Right from its inception, this initiative, that has brought us together today, has had one fundamental goal. This is to empower and to connect secondary school students and harness their enthusiasm and insights so as to come up with plans to address global issues across all of the SDG Goals. I understand that, initially, the individual Plans will be presented in a Youth Conference prior to being synthesized by the RGSC into a National Plan that will be forwarded to our Prime Minister.

I need hardly emphasize how vital the SDGs are, given that they establish the international framework that is the foundation on which our collective future rests, a future that should be economically, ecologically and socially sustainable.

Mauritius, as you know, has been active in the global conversation to approve the Post-2015 Development agenda. In fact, the vision and the goals in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development echo our local aspirations and concerns. Meeting the SDGs is within our reach—provided all governments, global institutions, the private sector, civil society and citizens act in unison and adopt a concerted approach.

Dear Students,

I do hope you realize the extent to which it is important for **you** to have a working familiarity with the SDGs. The world, as we know it, is, unfortunately, no utopia. Countries are racked by problems like hunger and famine; increasing disparity between the rich and the poor; conflicts that have ethnicity or extremism at their root; gender inequality and the like. As for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), I need hardly specify the alarming environmental risks these are exposed to.

Solving these problems requires at the very outset an awareness, a recognition of these as problems—and it takes you, the next generation, to militate against them and overcome them.

Besides, I personally consider that an awareness of the SDGs helps to expand the horizon of our youth and enables them to move out of a restrictive insularity. Just because we live on an island is no justification for our schools to have a limitative, self-centered and inward-looking perspective. Our students must have a much broader and certainly more international approach to global issues and be alive to them.

So, I repeat, it is important for young persons like you to be fully aware of the SDGs and seek in your own way to suggest ways and means of successfully attaining the Goals set.

That being said, we still have a school of thought that believes that implementing the SDGs is primarily the responsibility of adults.

In fact, watch what happens in most International Conferences that target the SDGs directly or indirectly: It is always the adults who are in the forefront highlighting what should or should not be done. It would seem that it is part of their custodial bailiwick.

Of course, there is the occasional Youth Forum, too, but youth should be involved in a more structural way.

This is probably because some people feel that the capacity of youth to provide views is still at a formative stage, still inchoate.

And yet youth are a key, an inescapable stakeholder. Not having them on board would be tantamount to having a “voice poverty”!

The **Young Mauritians’ Plan for the Planet** is one way for young persons to get up and say, “It’s my call. Let me now contribute to the debate, to the implementation process.”

So, thank you, students, for being in the forefront and engaging yourselves in this innovative extracurricular program.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will not go into the details of this pioneering program-- Mr. Ian Chambers, the Director, is much better placed to go into its several ramifications. So, I would much rather vacate the space for him to do that.

But I would wish to highlight that the **Young Mauritians’ Plan for the Planet** fits in perfectly with our professed, our avowed determination to provide a holistic education to our youth.

Having a systemic approach to learning that integrates business planning and management methods with science and social issues is precisely one way of realizing this aim.

Besides, a whole panoply of skills and competencies is being developed –from leadership and teamwork to research and communication.

And more vitally, I do believe, such a program will lead to a substantial change, both in attitude and in behaviour so as to achieve the outcomes set out in the SDGs.

Dear Students and Teachers - The **Young Mauritians’ Plan for the Planet** will directly impact you, the 120 student - participants and 30 teachers in Mauritius.

However, do not make of it a project with a sunset clause. I would earnestly appeal to you not to just stop there once you would have worked on and developed your Project.

Sustaining the effort becomes extremely important—there is no glory in having a one-off project that comes with a sell-by or expiry date. Rather, I would wish all of you engaged in this Program to endeavor to disseminate this awareness, first, among your school peers but also among schools in the neighborhood. Use the digital technology that you are native to and proficient in to link up with schools and to discuss the Goals.

I will at this point also make a plea to Heads of Schools present here to enable the facilitation of students' interactions with other schools. Equally, do see to it that you incorporate the Global Goals into the school activities.

Remember that you are 10 **Pilot** schools—and you are duty bound to make of the Program a success so that it can be successfully rolled out to other secondary schools.

Just a quick word in passing: Unfortunately, at this piloting stage, no school from Rodrigues has been involved. It is both my wish and expectation that, whenever it is rolled out-- as I am sure it will-- the Program gets to be extended to students in Rodrigues as well.

Before I end, Ladies and gentlemen, let me once again express my appreciation to HE the High Commissioner and Mr. Ian Chambers, Director of the **Young Persons Plan for the Planet** Program, for their support in embedding this highly groundbreaking program into some of our schools.

A special word for the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre that has been systematically organizing several science-related activities that have proved enriching for primary and secondary level students. I know

there are quite a few programs targeted for this year, and this workshop organized in collaboration with Australia can only be another feather in the cap of the RGSC.

Good luck and God's speed in this new venture.

Thank you for your attention