**EARTH DAY 2014**

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**Ravindranath Tagore Secondary School**

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A very GOOD MORNING and welcome to Earth Day Celebration 2014

It is indeed an honour and privilege for me, to address to you on this solemn event of our planet: the EARTH DAY.

The theme selected for this year is “Green Cities”.Like Earth Days of the past, Earth Day 2014 will focus on the unique environmental challenges of our time. As the world’s population migrates to cities, and as the bleak reality of climate change becomes increasingly clear, the need to create sustainable communities is more important than ever.

Earth Day 2014 will seek to do just that! through its global theme: **Green Cities**. With smart investments in sustainable technology, forward-thinking public policy, and an educated and active public, we can transform our cities and forge a sustainable future. Nothing is more powerful than the collective action of a billion people across the world.

Each year, 22 April remains a very special date for us, to remember! This key global event is organized to foster appreciation for the earth's environment and awareness of the issues that threaten it. Many of these issues relate directly to greenhouse gas emission, anthropogenic carbon, oil spill clean-up and soil contamination from run-off.

Let us first of all pay tribute, on this special day, to U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson who proposed a bill designating April 22 as a national day to celebrate the Earth. Ever since, Earth Day is officially observed in April throughout the world.

I find it just appropriate to share with you this quote from Gaylord Nelson:

**“The wealth of the nation is its air, water, soil, forests, minerals, rivers, lakes, oceans, scenic beauty, wildlife habitats and biodiversity… that’s all there is. That’s the whole economy. That’s where all the economic activity and jobs come from. These biological systems are the sustaining wealth of the world.”**

End of quote.

Faced with the challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, food shortages, worsening poverty and the global financial downturn, it is ever more important that we double our efforts to protect and rehabilitate the environment, reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, and provide especially the planters and farmers with sustainable ways of increasing their production and meeting their livelihood needs.

For the last three decades, the **Green Belt Movement,**a programme initiated by Professor Wangari Maathai and the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK), has performed a double duty in organising the planting of trees.  It both reduces the effects of deforestation and provides a forum for women to be creative and effective leaders.

Dear students, promoting rain water harvesting, using electricity wisely and planting appropriate trees at home, in farms and school compounds would make a huge positive impact on the environment and related global problems.

In this connection I wish to commend Honourable D.Virasamy, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, who has recently taken an initiative to have tree planting ceremony in all schools on occasion of Earth Day and World Environment Day.

To this end seedlings will be distributed in all schools. This planting of seedlings will grow into trees in years to come, irrespective of species and format of planting. Such an initiative would reduce risks, give you plenty of oxygen and diversify options for planters and farmers.

However, all of us, scientists, extension workers, policymakers, academicians, students and civil society have a vital role to play in addressing, and providing practical and sustainable solutions for this challenge.

Recently, the **ENO Tree Planting Day and Tree Olympiads 2014** have been launched in our schools. *Environment on line-* (ENO)is a global virtual school network for a sustainable development with the aim to promote tree planting on two UN days in context of World Bio-diversity Day on 22 May and on Peace Day on 21 September 2014. You can all participate in the Tree Olympiads 2014.

The **United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+ 20**, recognizes the importance of coordinated, balanced and integrated actions to address the sustainable development challenges facing Small Island Developing States. In the **3rd Global SIDS Conference**, political commitment will be renewed to address the special needs and vulnerability of SIDS.

Dear students, challenges are enormous!

Despite the inherent constraint of a Small Island Developing States and a resource-scarce economy, Mauritius has achieved economic growth over years. This progress has seen rapid changes in our daily behaviour and our mind-set. In order to move towards a sustainable and prosperous future, and to have a better world ahead, much has to be done to address all dimensions of development in line with Maurice Ile Durable project.

The long-term vision for making Mauritius “A world Model for sustainable development” frames sustainable development and green economic growth in the context of the 5 “E”: Environment, Energy, Education/ economy, Employment, Equity.

However, as Education is a key element for economic and social advancement, much remains to be achieved in this field.

At school level an intensive sensitization programme has already started with the introduction of **Green School Project** since a couple of years.

To further consolidate this idea, **the MID Clubs** have been launched in all secondary schools since 2013. This MID Club will harmonize all existing clubs like Environment Club, Science Club, Benevolent club and others.   
Students are already engaged in a few petty eco-friendly actions taken daily in the school compound and which have now become a lifestyle for many and a common practice in many schools as well.

Moreover, they need to be replicated in all schools, depending on their environment. Your petty actions taken today for your immediate environment will contribute largely to save our planet. You will have to make a choice for the future you want to live. This future lies in your own hands.

As youth you should also strive for toxics free environment as well. Overcrowding, toxic waste sites, polluted indoor air, toxic chemical and pesticide use, …These are words that make us cringe, yet more than ten years into the 21st century, all these hazards continue to threaten the health and well-being of our children. But the threat to school children from environmental health problems is just as real. Discover how you can create a toxics free environment at your school. It's simpler than you think.

According to the **Johannesburg Plan of Implementation**, adopted by school leaders at the **2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development**, the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in the industrialized countries. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising for the future generations.

At the **Expert Meeting on Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development in Africa held in Mauritius by UNESCO in March 2013**, much was discussed on the way forward to the implementation of Climate Change Education, on capacity building for climate change adaptation and disaster management in our schools. There is an urgent need to empower youth to mitigate and adapt to climate change and have efficient use of natural resources to ensure resilience in our continent.

Today reflection upon Education is never only reflection about schools or teaching and learning, but also implies reflection about our future society. We need to shape the FUTURE, to enable our young people to subsist in the dynamic changes of our world, but also to actively and positively shape the world they want to live in and the healthy air they want to breathe!

Today, you will proceed to the Tree Planting Ceremony. It should be a sustained activity at school.

I would like to end on this note:

“**When we plant trees, we plant the seed of peace and hope**.” *WangariMathai*

LONG LIVE OUR PLANET!!

Thank you for your attention.

**Protocols**

**Hon Devanand Virasawmy, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development,**

**Hon SatyaVeyash Faugoo, Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security and Attorney General,**

**Hon Satyaprakash Ritoo, Minister of Youth and Sports,**

**Director, Zone 1,**

**Rector of Ravindranath Tagore Secondary School**

**Rectors and Head Masters of neighbouring schools,**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

**And dear students**

**Distinguished guests,**