Address by Hon. (Mrs) Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, Minister of Education & Human Resources, Tertiary Education & Scientific Research

Presentation of findings on ICT sector
**Thursday 16 November 2017 @ 14 30 hrs
HRDC Lecture Theatre, 4th Floor, NG Tower, Cybercity, Ebène**

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon to you all.

I am pleased to be here today to launch the validation exercise for the skills study on the ICT sector undertaken by the HRDC.

ICT is one important pillar of our economy. In fact, the ICT sector is believed to be one of the most dynamic industries in the world, constituting, as it does, a powerful tool to open up new prospects for sustainable development. It also holds great promises and even greater prospects for leapfrogging for small island economies like ours.

Figures speak for themselves. The latest report published by Statistics Mauritius shows that, between 2015 and 2016, the value addition of the ICT sector rose by 3.9%-- from Rs 21,137 million in 2015 to Rs 21,956 million in 2016. We can also see that employment in large establishments operating in the ICT sector has increased by 2.6% -- from 15,006 in 2015 to 15,390 in 2016.

Technological evolution has a profound and continual impact on the way we live, work and play. The advancement of ICT has accentuated international connectivity and accelerated the pace of globalisation, and our Government is determined to use technology as a key lever to enhance our country's role in the international economic value–chain.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ICT sector comprises diverse segments such as telecommunications services, manufacturing undertakings, wholesale and retail trade and such other activities as call centres, software and website development, multimedia, IT consulting and even disaster recovery.

In fact the ICT sector cuts across all sectors of the economy.

This phenomenon of rapid integration of technologies in everyday life and the increasing importance of ICT for economic development at every level have created a globally significant increase in demand for highly-skilled information technology experts. Workers with ICT skills are needed in practically every industry.

Government realises this all too well and is aware of its crucial responsibility in building and maintaining a sustainable and world-class ICT workforce, and this with the support of other stakeholders.

We recognise that a solid ICT skills base is needed to meet the current and future needs of our economy. In fact, Government's heavy investment in workforce training and development bears testimony to our unrelenting efforts to provide the best tools to manage our people talent as the bedrock of economic growth.

Further, the Government Programme 2015 -2019 spells out the commitment to promote Mauritius as an ICT/BPO destination. New policies and strategies are accordingly being introduced to transform the ICT/BPO landscape into high value service sourcing: the move indeed is from the traditional BPO / call centre services to high-end value added services such as Knowledge Outsourcing, Knowledge Process Outsourcing and Legal Process Outsourcing.

To enhance value and improve technical efficiency within our local ICT sector and to develop local capacity, a National Open Source Policy and Strategy is being developed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mauritius is presently ranked 49th out of 139 countries in terms of networked readiness, as reported by the latest World Economic Forum's *Global Information Technology Report* of 2016. This classifies Mauritius first among African countries in this list.

Just to clarify: Networked readiness is a tool to assess the readiness of a country to reap the benefits of emerging technologies and make the most of the opportunities presented by digital transformation. Already, the price of telecommunication services in Mauritius is more affordable to ensure increased accessibility to the general public and to businesses. Simultaneously, there is marked improvement in the quality of service. Free broadband internet connectivity through Wi-Fi network is equally available in public places and in educational institutions.

But with all the expected and vibrant economic developments comes the need in Mauritius for the right quality and quantity of manpower.

Tilting the scales either way can spell trouble. Thus, skills shortage, itself a global concern, can result in bottleneck in output and reduce productivity. On the other hand, a surplus of trained workers can cause serious unemployment or underemployment-- which represents a squandering of national resources.

One way to tackle this problem is through training of the workforce. We want to develop talents who can respond to global industry shifts and help strengthen the role of Mauritius at both the regional and global levels.

In fact, through initiatives like the present one, we would like to come up with programmes that would equip our people with in-depth industry domain knowledge and skills. These will help enterprises, not only those engaged in ICT, but also those in various other economic sectors to leverage on talents for business growth.

I highly commend this initiative of the HRDC to develop a report which provides the evidence base to demonstrate what the ICT industry skill needs are, and the measures that can be taken to reduce the skills gap.

The objective of this study is to review the supply of, and demand for, skills required to address the skill needs of the ICT industry in Mauritius. The availability of skills and talent is seen by the industry as a key prerequisite for future competitiveness, investment and employment.

Let me reassure you that we will not stop at just developing this Skills Study report. It is what we do with it that counts.

To ensure the adequacy of the supply of ICT skills and talent, we want to come up with recommendations on strategies that can help reduce

skills gap in Mauritius. This demands that we work collaboratively with all stakeholders, the private sector included.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me end by congratulating all the working group members for their hard work and amount of time dedicated to this project. I would also like to thank all of you present today and I urge you to share your invaluable expertise and knowledge to make this validation exercise a success.

Unless we know the skills and competences requirements of the ICT, we will not be able to provide the necessary support.

With this, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have the pleasure to declare this first in a series of validations open and wish you all fruitful deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.