

Address of Hon. (Mrs.) Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun
Vice-Prime Minister
Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and
Technology

Opening Ceremony

***Building a Roadmap for the Establishment of a Mauritian
National Research and Education Network (NREN)***

4th December 2019
St Regis, Le Morne

A Very Good Morning to you all.

I am delighted to be here today to launch this full day workshop on “Building a Roadmap for the Establishment of a Mauritian National Research and Education Network (NREN)”.

At the onset, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Mauritius to the special guests, the Chief Executive Officer of UbuntuNet Alliance and the respective CEOs of SomaliREN, ZAMREN and of TENET who took time out of their busy schedule to be present this week in Mauritius.

I am sure the organisers and other stakeholders will make maximum use of your considerable experience while charting the way forward in this ambitious project of setting up an NREN in Mauritius, slated to be a major landmark in the higher education landscape of Mauritius.

With such an expert group of people around, I do not think I have to dwell on what a *National Research and Education Network* (NREN) is. Suffice it to say that it is a dedicated high-speed network that enables

access to online resources for students and researchers. We all also know that an NREN supports content-level collaboration in research and education and facilitates advanced applications like high performance computing.

I would like here to express my appreciation for and congratulate the NREN Inter-Universities Committee, with members coming from the University of Mauritius and the University of Technology, Mauritius, for organising this workshop today, under the aegis of my Ministry.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) for sponsoring this event.

Mauritius, ladies and gentlemen, has the legitimate ambition to become a knowledge hub in the region, and to this end, we must give ourselves the means to shine and succeed. Of course, we do not build and consolidate such a hub overnight, especially if we want it to be effective, sustainable and region-specific. Our vision is a long term one, and appropriate time and effort must be put in to properly plan its success in its finest details.

And we know that one of the pillars—in fact a fundamental prop—of a Knowledge Hub happens to be the fillip, the impetus given to research, to the generation of new knowledge.

Since 2017, ladies and gentlemen, academic research has been actively promoted through numerous initiatives spearheaded by the TEC. Thus, funds have been secured for successive years so that several

research schemes could be successfully developed, launched and implemented.

To-date, the Tertiary Education Commission, which manages these research schemes, receives more than 100 applications every year, out of which about 40 to 50 are accepted, following a strict peer review process.

We have, however, observed that the research community has special needs and many a time, some of these needs cannot be met by the local infrastructures, thus adversely affecting on the research drive.

Alternatives have had to be sought and explored and partnerships forged.

Mauritius has thus gone beyond its boundaries and established links with other countries and blocs for the promotion of higher education and research. Thus, the latest one has been the partnership between my Ministry and the French Government for the Project Hubert Curien – Le Réduit, for funding the mobility of researchers between Mauritius and France.

Also, Mauritius has been one of the first to ratify the UNESCO Addis Convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications across Africa, a Convention that rests on the premise of facilitation of mobility and collaboration between and among academic institutions as well as between and among researchers.

Additionally, Ladies and gentlemen, we are currently having talks with the African Union to see how Mauritius can best tap into the research grants on offer by the AU.

Similarly, we are discussing with the World Bank for the hosting of the next PASET workshop in Mauritius.

Currently, my Ministry is also involved in the ambitious policy project of rationalizing the public higher education sector, with one of the constituent and prominent aspects being an enhanced inter-institutional collaboration through the sharing of materials and research data. This will add on to the National Open Educational Resources (OER) Policy also under finalization.

I am citing these few examples to show that Mauritius is open to collaborate with various institutions across Africa and elsewhere, as we believe it is only by joining forces that we can better achieve success. It is by joining hands that we can satisfy our curiosity to know more, fulfil our drive to discover new things. This is precisely, I believe, what Albert Einstein had in mind when he stated, and I quote,

“I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious.”

End of quote. I will urge us all to be inspired by these words.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have been told that an NREN can provide high-speed reliable network for academic and scientific collaborations with bandwidth optimized for research and educational applications. It can also provide access to regional and international online resources. It can further help link institutions to regional centres and international collaborating

partners, thereby preventing “academic isolation” as well as providing access to high cost instrumentation and laboratories.

The idea has also been put forward that a Mauritian NREN can be used to allow the sharing of local resources among local institutions, e.g. the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC) , TEC and Universities.

I am positive that our HE institutions, and certainly my Ministry are looking forward, during this workshop, to be exposed to the opportunities and operational modalities for the setting up of such an NREN in Mauritius. We are already aware of the benefits such a network will bring to institutions of higher learning, especially in helping to optimize their research and education collaboration initiatives.

As significantly, it will be a huge opportunity to make more robust the much –needed intra-continental community of research networks.

This being said, however, we should keep the financial implications in view. We are aware that Mauritius has a number of priorities lined up for an accelerated development of the country—and these diverse priorities require massive investments. It goes without saying therefore that cost effectiveness should be the guiding principle in the establishment of the NREN.

With this in view, I remain confident that the advice of the delegation on the technical, financial and governance aspects of NRENs will prove invaluable in determining the way forward. With 15 NRENs already

established across Eastern and Southern Africa, I am convinced that UbuntuNet Alliance will be able to help Mauritius establish a fit-for-purpose roadmap for the local NREN too.

To paraphrase Sir Isaac Newton, standing on the shoulders of giants and gaining from the past experience and good practices of others, does enable us to see much further and presents a huge scope for leapfrogging.

On this note, Ladies and Gentlemen, I now have the pleasure and privilege to declare open this workshop on “Building a Roadmap for the Establishment of a Mauritian National Research and Education Network (NREN)”

I thank you for your attention and wish you fruitful deliberations.