

**Speech of Hon. (Mrs.) Leela Devi DOOKUN-LUCHOOMUN
Minister of Education & Human Resources, Tertiary Education and
Scientific Research**

**On the occasion of the Opening Ceremony of
The Workshop on Drug Prevention Curriculum Drafting
In collaboration with United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
and CIM group**

Thursday 10 May 2018 at 10.30 a.m.

At Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel, Port Louis

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning to all of you

It is a great pleasure for me to be present here at the Opening Ceremony of the two-day workshop on Drug Use Prevention Curriculum.

At the very outset, I would wish to express my gratitude to the Honourable Prime Minister who, despite his busy schedule, has been able to make time to be present today as we discuss an issue of major importance. We all know the extent to which he is committed to the fight against this bane of our society and we all recognise his endeavours to make of the prevention of drug use a high priority on Government's agenda,

Thank you, Prime Minister.

I also wish to thank UNODC and CIM Group for their invaluable contribution towards Drug Use Prevention.

Allow me at this stage to welcome Ms Giovanna Campello, Officer responsible for the Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section at UNODC Headquarters, as well as Dr. Reyshad Abdool, Consultant at the UNODC, and to express our appreciation to them for their willingness to share their professional expertise with us.

I am confident that the sharing of their rich experience and know-how will be instrumental in infusing a new dimension in the quality of the Drug Prevention- Related Materials in the curriculum.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I have just stated, the prevention of drug use is a high priority on this Government's agenda. We, at the level of my Ministry, are especially concerned because we all know how exposed, how vulnerable our young learners are. On the one hand, the difficult transition from adolescence to teenage places them at risk and, on the other, adolescence for many is a period of experiment, of discovery—and peer pressure does not always lead that experimental urge in the right direction. .

Youthful immaturity and lack of life experience create a situation where they only tend to be aware of the consequences of their actions when it is already too late.

So, it is our sacrosanct duty to show concern and translate that concern into practical action.

Accordingly, at the level of my Ministry, we have adopted a **Zero-tolerance policy** in regard to all cases of indiscipline, including drugs.

I need to reiterate this: My Ministry is committed to maintaining a safe and supportive environment for its youthful community and is thus deploying all necessary efforts to educate and empower our students on drug resistance and resilience skills to counter the drug scourge and thus maintain them safe and healthy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My Ministry is actively involved in a collaborative networking with the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life, the "*Brigade pour la protection des Mineurs*", and the ADSU, amongst others, to deliver a structured prevention programme in our institutions as far as drug and substance abuse is concerned.

Sensitisation campaigns at the level of schools are ongoing in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders. Thus, from January to December 2017, the Harm Reduction Unit of the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life had carried out Drug Use Prevention Programmes in 159 Schools covering over 33,000 students. The Police, for their part, have sensitised more than 200,000 students over the same period.

In addition, a Health and Wellness Directorate has been set up at the level of my Ministry since the beginning of this year. As the name indicates, it has a

whole set of activities and functions to accomplish, these comprising, *inter alia*, Drug Use Prevention in our Schools.

Indeed, we firmly believe that the initiative to have a proper and dedicated curriculum for drug prevention and substance abuse requires a dedicated and coordinated approach.

We are obviously not alone in undertaking this task. Numerous countries have integrated substance misuse education into the school curriculum. The aim is always to help students make informed choices and develop an understanding of the impact that risk-taking behaviour can have on their life choices.

One fact stands out, though. All these countries have realised that there is always a heavy educational price to pay when students succumb to drugs—and that can stretch from truancy and absenteeism at one end of the spectrum to poor performance, grade repetition and school dropout/ attrition at the other end.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The proactive measures that we are taking with today's Workshop are in fact part of an educational reform agenda that makes of the promotion of values and sound life skills one of its central pillars. We are aiming at the wholesome development of the learners; we want them to become responsible citizens of tomorrow and pave the way for the wellbeing of future generations to come.

We cannot insist enough upon this: Sensitising our youth about the ill effects of illicit substances is tantamount to saving a whole generation.

It is in this context that I am delighted to hear that this workshop will come up with curricular techniques to challenge the young minds into critically assessing societal norms and beliefs related to all kinds of substance abuse, including alcohol. Coping mechanisms and problem solving will thus find their way into the programme.

However, social and individual well-being is not the exclusive business or preserve of Education alone. My Ministry is all too aware of the significance of taking different stakeholders on board, partnering with them and

strengthening the collaborative approach. This cooperative spirit is essential for the success of our endeavours and is instrumental in encouraging a positive school climate and facilitating a safe and supportive school environment.

In this context, I need to reiterate my appreciation for the CIM Group for their support to this initiative.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This two-day Workshop is definitely going to enhance the quality, availability and accessibility of Drug Use Prevention related materials in the curriculum. What I also deem most appropriate is the fact that the Workshop will itself be followed by two other related actions on drug use prevention at school level: One, there is to be a “Training of the Trainers” programme primarily for the benefit of those who are the frontline implementers at school level, namely, the Educators. Nor will Head of schools and health workers be forgotten. Besides, this ToT programme will be conducted for both Mauritius and Rodrigues personnel.

The second action relates to the setting up a Drug Use Prevention Programme for Secondary Schools. In fact, my Ministry has already embarked upon the process of setting up such a Programme: the expertise of the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) resource persons in this regard will certainly be very useful to us.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Government has been taking strong action against drug traffickers and peddlers. Drugs are destroying the lives of our youth and putting their future in great jeopardy. I hardly need to expatiate on the socioeconomic costs of drug addiction and the vulnerability it ushers in.

Some three or four decades ago, there was a campaign that sought to encourage young persons to reject experimenting with or using drugs. The campaign hinged on the catchphrase “Just say No!”. It worked for some time before it fizzled out – and it fizzled out because youth were not helped to find out what to say yes to!

Let us not repeat the mistake. There is so much of a positive nature that our students can say yes to.

As Pope Francis said sometime in 2014, to say "no" to drugs, "*one has to say 'yes' to life, 'yes' to love, 'yes' to others, 'yes' to education, 'yes' to greater job opportunities.*"

Allow me here, Ladies and gentlemen, to thank the Hon. Prime Minister for his relentless support in helping us shape the future of our children and ensuring that the promise of a safe environment exists for them to say yes to. To conclude, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to this great network of participants, who are supporting my Ministry's endeavours in ensuring that we combat this drug scourge promptly and efficiently.

I thank you all for your attention.