

Speech of
Hon (Mrs) L.D.Dookun-Luchoomun
Global Young Academy's Second Africa Young Academies
Regional Conference
Le Voila, Bagatelle
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Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me an immense pleasure, as Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research to be in your midst this morning for the Opening Ceremony of the Global Young Academy's Second Africa Young Academies Regional Conference.

I am especially pleased that, since its official launch in February 2010. The Academy has done much appreciable work. I must say that its concern to give Science its rightful place in the scheme of innovation and development strikes a chord for us in Mauritius. For we are concerned about the necessity for innovative science policies as well as the creation of the right research environment to foster national growth.

But Mauritius, we know, is not alone in this type of aspiration.

Illustratively, Japan organized the 13th Science and Technology in Society (STS) Forum from 2 to 4 October 2016. The STS fora, as you all are aware, traditionally aim at providing a platform for open discussions on an informal basis and help build a human network that would, in time, resolve the new and emerging problems through the application of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI).

We are living at a time when we are all talking about the 4th Industrial Revolution, an age of big data, the Internet of things, the Internet of systems and the like. Japan's desire to create its Super Smart Society

referred to as Society-5.0 only demonstrates the extent to which science and its handmaid, Technology, have become the inestimable and invaluable elements of an information-based society.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me express my appreciation that some young scientists of Mauritius are now actively working on the setting up of a National Young Academy in Mauritius. This is indeed a laudable initiative: Our young scientists have to create the platform from which to further promote their passion for research. I am therefore appreciative of the fact that the Global Young Academy will certainly support the local chapter of the Academy—very much as it has done for Egypt, the Philippines, Japan, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria, Israel, and Kenya.

However, we should all realise that there are conditionalities that have to be kept in view. Setting up a Young Academy in itself demands the necessity to be guided by some fundamental norms.

One of them is the need to create both awareness and understanding about highly technical scientific work. It is a fact, and all of you Scientists present here today will agree with me, that, no matter how accessible a technical scientific work is, it is only a very small percentage of the population who will get know about it or be able to understand it or, again, use it to some benefit.

And when scientific research is left exclusively to the backroom or reserved for the cognoscenti, something goes fundamentally wrong.

Let me go deeper into this element. My Ministry is hard-pressed from all quarters to provide more funds for research. In fact we all agree that research has historically been the poor parent where investment is concerned—and not only in Mauritius.

But we are getting there.

However, at the same time, we need to have results to show for it.

This is an ethical issue as well: the outcome of publicly-funded research has to be communicated at large. The public needs to know how its money has been spent and what we have learned, or not learnt, from spending it. Over the current year, the Government of Mauritius, through the MRC and my Ministry, has thus made available a significant amount of money for research. It is only natural that we should now be looking forward to quality research being put forward for the benefit of the scientific society but also the civil society at large. Let me share with you the supplementary fact that the Higher Education Bill my Ministry is currently elaborating will most probably bring in the necessity to have a mechanism of research funding--- but based on performance,. It is my expectation that this legislation will promote the setting up of an appropriate mechanism for a fairer distribution of funding.

Dear Young Scientists,

I also believe it would be highly relevant for you, in addition to lecturing and writing scientific papers, to conduct outreach work. You have to refurbish and firm up your communication skills, thereby promoting the concept of science communication.

Apart from conducting events for people who may have little in-depth knowledge of the topic, it would be highly salutary for you to engage in some mentoring and science-supporting acts as well. We all realise the significance that we have to attach to Science today. We all know the extent to which STEM—Science, Technology, Engineering and Math—has come to be prized for developmental purposes. The world over, the cry is for more science and innovative research.

And yet, scientific subjects are not necessarily being given pride of

place in students' choice of subjects.

We need to give a fillip to Science. The reforms my Ministry is bringing into the primary and secondary sub-sectors encompass as well the need to make science an attractive option. It is probably the methodology, the pedagogy that has to be changed.

It is the sense of wonder that has to be re-invented and instilled into our primary and secondary students.

And what can you do about it, as Young Scientists?

Remember that if you want to have students who are scientifically inclined to join your courses and later your Academy, you have to catch them young.

As you reflect upon your role and mission, I would like you to also consider how useful you could be for both teachers and students in the earlier sub-sectors of education.

And, incidentally, your actions would be in line with those of many GYA members who take part in science education and outreach activities in schools and universities around the world.

Allow me to also seize the opportunity of this assembly of eminent scientists from Africa, and elsewhere, to request you Young Scientists all to consider and promote trans-border collaboration. It is increasingly being seen that scientists in different parts of the world are in fact actively working on similar societal problems and issues. Nobel Prize winners are demonstrating their capacity to work on different continents and still stretch their hands for a collaborative approach to their findings. Let frontiers not act as a barrier to you, therefore.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear eminent scientists, dear emerging and bright young scientists of the Global Young Academy,

I know that my hope for you to find scientific solutions for the

betterment of our society is not misplaced.

I am also proud to note that Mauritius has three members in the Global Young Academy—and that one of these three members, Dr Vidushi Neergheen-Bhujun, this conference co-chair, has even been on the GYA Executive Committee for two years. Congratulations to you Dr Neergheen-Bhujun—and to your team of young scientists of the University of Mauritius for having prepared and organized this conference in Mauritius.

I do look forward to receiving a report of the outcome of this conference, hoping that you will all have fruitful deliberations, an enriching experience in Mauritius and that this will culminate into active cross-border collaboration and outreach activities.

With this, I have the pleasure to declare the Global Young Academy's Second Africa Young Academies Regional Conference Open.