

**Speech of Honourable (Mrs) L.D.Dookun-Luchoomun**

**HERANA Forum: Strengthening Research Universities in Africa**

**Tuesday 12 July 2016**

**Good Morning**

It gives me great pleasure to be here today amidst all of you for this forum at the University of Mauritius. This is indeed the type of platform that should be frequently provided to all stakeholders if we want to tread the path that leads to a progressive stance for Universities.

As you know, my Ministry has systematically placed research high on its Agenda. And research is necessarily a vital appendage of any University. The equation is obvious: research tends to advance our store of knowledge and knowledge is instrumental in accelerating the developmental thrust of societies.

I tend to always highlight the fact that, sometimes, a motto says it all: “*Scientia salus patriae*’-- “Knowledge at the service of the nation”. That in itself indicates the link between Research and Development. Indeed, it is salutary for universities, including the UoM, to continue to participate in the national development strategy of the country.

And such research be crucial at a time when new growth poles are being envisaged—the Ocean economy, Biotechnology, Renewable energy and others. Nor should we forget the significance of applied research in a bid to strengthen the resilience of small and vulnerable states like Mauritius.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

For many countries, knowledge has today become the ‘capital’ *par excellence* and societies that successfully push back the frontiers of knowledge, societies that generate innovative knowledge, are precisely those that take pride of place in the community of nations . The Government I have the privilege to be part of it, has made it its priority to transform Mauritius into a Knowledge Hub and our Tertiary Education Institutions obviously have a major stewardship role to play here.

For the UoM, aspiring to be a Research University is obviously a step in the right direction and this will supplement the existing partnerships and extensive network with reputed and high-caliber higher education and research institutions that the University has already established, both regionally and further afield. The 9th Edition of the UoM Research Week to be organised from 12 to 16 September 2016 will hopefully add an additional feather to the cap of the UoM.

## **Distinguished Guests**

Obviously, we still have a long way to go. Our Continent has a long way to go. True, Higher Education, in Mauritius as on the Continent in general, has evolved rapidly as can be witnessed by the host of higher education providers.

Nonetheless, the problems are also manifold.

Higher education in Africa has been facing many challenges such as Faculty Shortage, the problems of quality and relevance, financial

constraint and lack of capacity of diversification. However, one of the most important challenges is improving their research and innovation capacity.

Some of the institutions do not yet have the relevant research expertise, facilities or funding to actively generate knowledge or innovate. Others do not invest enough in research and innovation in high priority areas such as natural resources, applied sciences, health sciences, engineering and technology. This has therefore limited their capacity in meaningfully contributing to development in their countries.

So, obviously, it comes as a relief to note that the Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA) coordinated by the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) has a research component investigating relationship between the higher education and development in Africa.

I am told that one major aspect of the HERANA project has been the collection, over three phases, of data on student enrolments, academic staffing and research outputs from a selected group of eight African universities.

I am all too eager to discover the findings and recommendations of the Team with respect to the Research Universities. I am especially enthused by the idea that Research Universities, as a network, commit themselves to the creation and dissemination of knowledge in a range of disciplines and fields. They also make space and funding available for appropriate laboratories, libraries and other infrastructures that permit teaching and research at the highest possible level.

I need hardly stress that, as part of the African renaissance, our several countries have to get themselves the means and wherewithal to join the global knowledge society and compete with sophisticated economies.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is heartening for me to see that, through our participation in this Forum, there is a possibility for the region to synergize its efforts in its quest for relevance, quality, efficiency and effective partnerships in the vital field of higher education and research.

Such solidarity at supranational levels reflects our willingness to embrace collegiality and knowledge-sharing. I, for one, construe sharing and networking in research as the bedrock for the construction of the identity of the Continent.

Prof Cloete, allow me at this juncture to inform you that Mauritius is equally very active in the Indian Ocean and South African Regions through our memberships of the SADC, the IOR, the COMESA and the Indian Ocean Commission, and their respective initiatives in science and technology.

We see these initiatives, along with the current efforts from the HERANA, as an additional spoke of our human development framework. For we are also guided by the objective to support the development of our region in meeting the increasingly complex human knowledge needs of a constantly transforming environment.

I will equally allow myself to inform you, Ladies and gentlemen, that, in our bid to fructify our engagement in academic and applied

knowledge into concrete results, one of the practical efforts we are currently engaged in is that of the Square Kilometre Array project.

This project is progressively evolving into a comprehensive framework of human resource development that will help take our region into the world of Science and Technology, particularly the world of information, communication and big-data as very valuable immediate spinoffs from research in space sciences.

I, however, must recognise the fact that more investment and engagement in research, and the local patenting of the results of research, are required from our institutions to enable them to be better benchmarked on the global arena. Countries of the region, including Mauritius, are gradually investing more in GDP in terms of research, it is true. However, more efforts in local funding and in tapping of external research funding agencies are needed.

Where needs be, policy re-steering measures are also required to enable enhanced research engagement to take place. Case in point, as we speak, we have an expert from the Commonwealth Secretariat in Mauritius to assist my Ministry in the drafting of the Higher Education Bill. All TEI's will be taken on board.

I soon intend to bring up this new Bill that will comprise new measures, amongst others, to give a fillip to our research efficiency and effectiveness for the benefit of the development of Mauritius and the region.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Let me conclude on this positive note. Bravo to the HERANA Forum for deciding to give a thrust to research universities.

I hope that you will all contribute in making this forum a successful venture in enhancing the capabilities of our Tertiary Education Institutions.

It is now my privilege and great pleasure to officially launch the **'HERANA Forum: Strengthening Research Universities in Africa'**.

*I thank you for your kind attention.*