

## **AWARENESS WEEK ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **OPENING CEREMONY**

**Address by** *Dr The Honourable V.K. Bunwaree, Minister of Education & Human Resources*

**Date :** *Wednesday 13 July 2011*

**Time :** *9.15 am*

**Venue:** *Paul Octave Wiehe Auditorium, Reduit*

- **Hon. Devanand Virahsawmy, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development**
- **Professor Thiel-Clemen, Department of Computer Science, Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, Germany**
- **Ms Nair, Associate Fellow and Area Convenor, Centre for Global Environment Research, The Energy and Resource Institute (TERI), New Delhi, India**
- **Professor Morgan, Vice-Chancellor, University of Mauritius**
- **Professor Jugessur, Pro-Chancellor, University of Mauritius**
- **Mr Rosunee, Associate Professor, Department of Textile Technology, University of Mauritius**
- **Distinguished Guests,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**
- **Dear Students,**

**Good morning.**

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to be here with you today. We are all aware of the devastating impact of climate change. I do not need to reiterate the facts and figures pertaining to rising sea levels, rise in global surface temperatures and increase in green house emissions, about which you will surely learn a lot today, to convince you that climate change is indeed a serious global challenge.

Without doubt, global warming is the most urgent environmental problem the world is facing in this decade. Scientists around the world are constantly warning us that global warming poses a major threat to our future quality of life and is likely to bring widespread and unpredictable changes around the world. It is clear that some impacts are already becoming evident.

Very soon the earth will become hotter than at any time in human history. In the last decades the problems of atmospheric change have been worsened by pollution resulting from human activities.

Humans are warming the earth's atmosphere by burning fuels, cutting down forests, and by taking part in other activities that release heat-trapping gases into the air. It is vital to all of us that we fully understand the complex relationship between the atmosphere and the earth.

It has been widely recognized that small island states are highly vulnerable to climate change and the resulting sea-level rise. Adaptation to these changes, on which countries should mainly focus, is one of the environmental challenges to be taken into consideration for sustainable development.

Anticipatory actions should be taken to mitigate the negative effects of these changes and priority should be given to the implementation of remedial measures. One possibility is to integrate climate change in the socio-economic development and management programmes at government and non-government levels.

In Mauritius, key socio-economic sectors which inter-alia are most likely to be affected by climate change and sea level rise are:

- coastal resources
- agriculture
- water resources
- fisheries
- health and well-being
- land use change and forestry and
- biodiversity

Mauritius is thus as vulnerable, if not more so, to climate change.

Climate change, it must be noted, is expected to have a negative impact on human health in Mauritius. A ‘two degrees Celsius’ increase in the average temperature when added to the already sultry conditions prevailing during summer in the capital city and the other coastal areas will be detrimental to the health of elderly persons, small children and chronic invalids. A nation bogged down by ill health will hardly be able to tackle climate change issues.

Agriculture is one of the most vulnerable sectors to climate change in Mauritius. It is expected that agricultural production will be directly affected by higher climate variability and extreme weather events and indirectly by reduced availability of water resources which we are currently experiencing and changes in physical and chemical properties of the soil.

The above are but two examples of impacts of climate change which are bound to have severe repercussions on society.

**There are two key ways of dealing with the impacts of climate change:**

- **The first** is to work to reduce the growth of greenhouse gases, and eventually to halt and then reverse emissions.
- **The second** is to prepare for and adapt to changes as best we can, in other words adapt to climate change.

With a concerted national effort, a lot can be done to reduce potential threats to human well-being and security. The scale of the climate change challenge demands that we work as hard as we can, on all possible fronts.

The Government has already shown that sustainable development, climate change and the environment will be a major focus in the years to come.

The majority of the world's population including policy and decision makers, especially in the developing countries, has little knowledge of climate change, its implications and ramifications in their day to day activities, and on the nation as a whole. Education, training and awareness are therefore of utmost importance in the formation of environmentally aware and enlightened citizens.

**With a view to create awareness for adaptation to climate change, all efforts are being made by my Ministry to develop education for sustainability at every 'level'.**

The purpose of Education for Sustainable Development is to reorient education in order to contribute to a sustainable future for the common good of present and future generations.

Education has the enormous challenge of reorienting curricula and learning processes towards sustainability and ensuring professional development of educators to take up these new challenges.

In order to strengthen Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), professional development **must include** teacher education, professional education for educational leaders, and community educators. Capacity building for development of user friendly teaching and learning materials to transmit values and skills to support ESD is crucial. In fact, training of all involved in education in its widest sense is essential.

The new National Curriculum Framework for the Pre primary sector recognizes, 'Early Childhood Education (ECE)' as the starting point for lifelong learning. It is during these early years that children present the greatest ability to learn and develop. 'Early Childhood Education for Sustainability', has the potential to foster socio-environmental resilience based on interdependence and critical thinking, thus setting foundations for lives characterised by self-respect, respect for others, and respect for the environment.

know from experience and research that young children are potential agents for change, and often influence their families and grandparents to change towards more sustainable thinking and behaviours.

At school, as prescribed by the new National Curriculum Frameworks, climate change and sustainable lifestyles is covered as cross cutting issues over a range of subjects taught at both primary and secondary levels.

Incorporation of topics related to climate change in the curricula of primary and secondary education will provide the future generation with sufficient

scientific understanding of global climate change to take an intelligent and informed interest in the nation's climate change policies.

Environmental concerns in the following areas, namely, use and management of resources, waste, pollution, basic health, environmental impact and sustainable living have already been addressed. New textbooks have been produced for primary school pupils which include climate change issues.

Various activities to promote awareness and sensitization sessions on climate change and adaptation are regularly organized for secondary school students. In this context, schools actively participate in several competitions. All schools join in for the annual Tree planting event on World Environment day.

'Environment Clubs' have been created in primary and secondary schools and the motivated and enthusiastic members have been given some information and training on climate change and its impacts. Drawing/Painting and essay competitions on climate change related topics are regularly organized with a view to increase awareness among students.

With the valuable help of different Ministries namely Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and NGOs, several projects such as ***the Green your School Project, Rainwater Harvesting, Segregation of Waste, Endemic Gardens and Composting*** have been introduced in our schools to promote sustainable life styles.

Discussions, debates, public talks, open seminars, research seminars and local workshops, organized by various organizations are ongoing and help to encourage and stimulate interest in climate change and its environmental impacts among the population.

There is urgent need to promote research in order to strengthen and extend education for sustainable development. **Research** must include community participation to mobilize indigenous and local knowledge.

It is also necessary to engage the civil society in finding solutions to sustainability problems and social change.

While not necessarily understanding the scientific principles of climate change as the underlying causes of these effects, people are nonetheless aware of them.

Increasingly warmer seasons, erratic rainfall, droughts followed by exceptionally heavy rains, coastal erosion, landslides, dwindling numbers of certain animals and plants, reduced yields in agriculture, fisheries, are some of the observed facts people often comment upon.

Such awareness among the public constitutes a resource base for non-formal education, which need to be encouraged and reinforced.

There is however need to create greater public awareness which should be accompanied by concrete visible actions such as setting up of drop off

centres for recyclables which are easily accessible to the general public, just to give one example.

The Maurice Ile Durable (MID) project so dear to the Prime Minister is undoubtedly one of the most laudable projects initiated by the Government as early as 2008. Since then both public and private sectors are making special efforts to integrate climate change in new developments strategies.

The MID vision cuts across many sectors like finance, social, bio-diversity protection, energy, climate change, waste management, land & sea management, agriculture, food security, poverty alleviation and transportation among others. In short the Maurice Ile Durable vision is not only about protection of environment but also about a vibrant economy, and social cohesion.

### **Ladies and gentlemen,**

All of us here are convinced that the devastating impacts of climate change, rising temperatures and increase in green house emissions are real. We all agree that climate change will put the future of human civilization at stake. Unchecked, climate change will pose unacceptable risks to our security, our economy, and our planet. And, we know for sure that we are running short of time.

We can no longer afford to keep having the same discussions and the same arguments time and again while the danger of climate change grows until it is irreversible.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

We need to act. Now is the time for all institutions and the people of this country to come together, behind a common purpose. We need to move quickly and boldly together, to shake off complacency, throw aside old habits and rise to meet this new challenge, head on.

Before I end, allow me to express my deep appreciation for the praiseworthy initiative taken by the University of Mauritius in organizing this Awareness Week on Climate Change and I wish you all a most fruitful exchange.

Thank you.