

MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND LANDS

Exploratory Meeting cum Working Session

on

“Government Social Housing Projects on a Private Public Partnership Basis”

held on

Wednesday 01 March 2006

at

LA CANNELLE

DOMAINE LES PAILLES

Address

by

Hon. M. Asraf DULULL, M.P.
Minister of Housing and Lands

Mr. Noorani Oozeer, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Lands

Honourable Members of the National Assembly

Sir Bhinod Bacha, Senior Adviser

Representatives of Ministries

Representatives of Para Statal Bodies and Government-owned Institutions

Representatives of the Private Sector

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you this afternoon on the occasion of this exploratory meeting cum working session on Government Social Housing Projects on a Private Public Partnership basis. I particularly appreciate the fact that you have made it a point to participate in this event and we look forward to benefit from your experience, your expertise, and your knowledgeable views on this important social issue.

In the wake of our Governmental Programme inspired by and based on the Programme of "l'Alliance Sociale" and the guiding philosophy behind it, and as a member of a team led by our visionary leader, Dr. the Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, our Prime Minister, I am assembling with you this afternoon to consider the way forward in the formalization and implementation of a pragmatic, realistic, and successful win-win housing programme, with due weightage to the aspirations of our people, their needs and requirements, their economic capabilities and capacity to pay, and the national interest.

YOU, are as well as WE, know that the happiness of the people is not merely essential for any caring Government, but also vital for the Private Sector. Indeed, a modern, dynamic, and sagacious Private Sector cannot escape or ignore its own social responsibilities and accountability, despite its normal and healthy profit motivations. Such a Private Sector benefiting from the role of a modern and democratic State as a Facilitator, and from the entrepreneurial drive of a Government which means business while caring non-stop for the people, cannot operate in a vacuum and in isolation, but as a privileged partner of the public sector.

We are thus today gathered as willing partners, and together, let us build a really modern and housing- happy Mauritius, and let us make of this partnership a willing and proactive partnership,

which shares a common vision, looks into the same direction, and aims at materializing our target of “*Un Toit Pour Toi*”.

I shall be interested, and indeed, I look forward to welcoming your views/suggestions and proposals on what factors you require, as business entrepreneurs, but also as responsible and society-conscious stakeholders, to embark on, and be part and parcel of our scheme to put a decent roof not only, though principally, on the heads of our less fortunate brothers and sisters, but also on those of our citizens who really need support to have their own homes.

Where there is a will, there is a way. We HAVE the will. You HAVE the will. Let us find together the RIGHT WAY FORWARD.

And to start off in real terms, let me share with you some facts, figures, thoughts, and realities.

As you are aware, my Ministry has several declared priorities, objectives and policies, and addressing the acute housing problem is a top most priority.

There are some 25,000 demands for a housing unit on the waiting list of the National Housing Development Company Ltd. and the Government has, in its Programme for the period 2005 – 2010, targeted the construction of a maximum of houses yearly. If Government alone is to supply the required number of houses, it will

take a long time to do so. We feel that the Private Sector also could be given the opportunity to participate in this programme. We, in fact, want to create a synergy with the private sector in addressing housing issues, so that the private sector can, first, have a share of the market and create employment opportunities and, second, so that the acute housing demand is addressed in a shorter period of time. I firmly believe that together, we can face this challenge and produce tangible results.

House ownership is an important indicator of social well-being. It is housing which determines the family structure and living, as well as health, sanitary and environmental conditions. The ownership of a house represents, for most people, the investment of a lifetime. We should, therefore, aim at providing adequate shelter to every household. Even though the Government 's primary focus is on social housing for the low-income earners, I believe that we should consider and cater for the needs of the middle-income earners as well.

Thus, mixed developments for low and middle income earners may provide the private sector with a better and larger scope to participate in the Government housing programmes. It is worth pointing out that, according to the Annual Digest of Statistics of 2004, 8,671 residential building permits were issued by the Local Authorities in 2002 and 8,712 in 2003.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have thought it necessary to meet and address you to-day, especially representatives of the private sector, to listen to and take stock of your suggestions and proposals regarding how best you can contribute your fair share in housing supply, including social housing.

We are here to-day to take cognizance of what may have so far impeded the participation of the private sector in the existing Government housing schemes designed to get private sector concerns interested in social housing programmes. We now need to put our heads together to give a fresh boost to these programmes.

Let me share with you two of the main objectives that I wish to be attained by my Ministry in addressing the social housing problem in the short and medium terms. First and foremost, there is need to provide a conducive environment to construct a maximum of social houses yearly. In fact, according to the Housing and Population Census 2000, the yearly housing need over the period 2000-2020 for household earning up to Rs 10,000 monthly is around 4,000.

Previously, and according to records, around 900 social housing units were built yearly. I have set as target the construction of at least 1500 houses annually, but I believe that building more than 1,500 housing units annually, is achievable.

It is a fact that public housing programmes demand heavy subsidies and constitute a rising burden on Government finance. I therefore consider that it is high time that we create the right enabling environment to promote the provision of housing units by the private sector and to streamline the housing programmes, while giving special support to the low income earners.

Our second objective is to promote private investment in housing projects for the benefit of the Vulnerable groups within a sustainable and an inclusive framework. The budget resources required by the social housing schemes of Government are quite substantial. There would be need to look for alternative sources for the building of social housing. One possibility is to revisit the Housing Development Certificate Scheme in consultation with private sector representatives, present here today, with a view to generating their interest in the scheme. I am sure that the participants will, before the end of the day, come up with interesting proposals which will be examined by the Government with a view to reengineering the scheme.

We are fully aware of the potential and innovative drive of the private sector. I am confident we can rely on its support to give a boost to the government's social housing programme. In fact, I have received a few proposals from some of you present here to-day. I believe that, in a spirit of transparency and fairness to all, we should

give everybody a chance to come up with valuable proposals. Hence, today's working session also aims at giving the opportunity to the participants to express their views on possible ways and means to improve the social housing programmes.

Countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong have had successful social housing programmes. Obviously, we cannot simply emulate what these countries have done. However, we should aim in the same direction, and come up with innovative local solutions to face challenges confronting the government's social housing programme.

Before ending, I should like to stress, in a spirit of togetherness, the importance for Government of your participation in the working session in the search of workable solutions if not suggestions. I look forward to productive discussions on housing issues. I trust we shall together come up with significant proposals.

I should also like to solemnly declare to you my utmost confidence in our country which is a country of achievers and achievements under the right and enlightened leadership of the Head of Government. I am optimistic. We shall triumph and reach our targeted destination together.

Please do make the most of this meeting, and I wish all participants a fruitful and productive working session.

01 March 2006

M. Asraf Dulull
Minister