

**ADDRESS BY HON. D.GOKHOOL,
MINISTER OF INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND RESEARCH**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE ACCREDITATION CERTIFICATE AWARD
CEREMONY
TO THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LABORATORY (NEL)**

**FRIDAY 10 JULY 2009
AT 14.30 HRS
Lecture Theatre II,
University of Mauritius, Reduit**

My colleague Hon Lormus Bundhoo, Minister of Environment and National Development Unit
Mr Seebaluck, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit
Mr Ragen, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Industry, Science and Research
Mrs Lan Ng, Director, Department of Environment
Prof Jhurry, Chairperson of the MAURITAS Advisory Council,
Mr Gopee, Acting Director, MAURITAS,
Directors and Chief Executives of laboratories,
Members of the Media
Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon

I am very pleased to be among you for this accreditation certificate award ceremony of the National Environmental Laboratory.

Today's award is being celebrated as it represents a landmark for the environmental sector: it is an initial step towards moving for optimal quality and excellence in the environmental testing laboratory services.

At the very first outset, allow me to congratulate all those who have worked hard so as to achieve accreditation and in particular the dynamic team of technical experts of the NEL who are in fact responsible for ensuring that the various parameters constituting our natural environment remain within appropriate limits.

Let us sincerely hope that this achievement serves in fact as a model for all the other laboratories, in the environmental and non-environmental sectors in Mauritius and will encourage them to tread on the path of accreditation.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,
Industrial Development & Environment**

Mauritius has made tremendous progress and development in the last 20 to 25 years by relying on the foundation pillars of the sugar, textile, tourism and services industry. While blossoming on the economic front, it has become more and more obvious that a lot of pressure is exerted adversely on the natural resources constituting our environment. In fact, we are constantly faced with the dilemma of boosting industrial development/ employment and wealth creation and protecting our environment against pollution. A number of issues related to freshwater, marine,

air, land, waste management and energy and biodiversity resources have made us realize that this is not the path to follow if we want to promote sustainable development in line with the “Maurice Ile Durable” Project.

Vision – New Industrial Strategy

Thus, over the last few years, this Government has launched a huge reform of its economic system in its endeavour to move from a system based on trade preferences to one based on global competitiveness, whilst also diversifying its foundation pillars for a sustainable future. We have to reckon that any new pillar that is developed will impact on the resources of the environment. It is therefore our collective responsibility as a nation to respond to this new challenge through coordinated and concerted action.

Government has decided in September last year, that the portfolio of my Ministry will now encompass the subject of Science and Research together with Industry. The vision of Government is to build up a strong, diversified and globally competitive industrial sector which is socially responsible and environmentally sustainable supported by Science, Technology and Innovation (STI). In this context, I am pleased to announce that my Ministry will very soon come up with a *new industrial and sme strategy* which will spouse the spirit of “Maurice Ile Durable”.

The strategy will ensure that we achieve sustainable industrial development by integrating environmental and social concerns in the equation whilst also adopting cleaner production technologies. All the above efforts will be of no use if goods and services from Mauritius are not able to access the foreign markets. We have thus recognized the crucial need to reduce non-tariffs barriers by adopting international standards, technical regulations and recognized conformity assessment procedures.

The national conformity assessment infrastructure comprises of institutions dealing with metrology, standards and accreditation.

Accreditation is the process by which an authoritative body like MAURITAS gives formal recognition that a body (for example a laboratory) is competent to carry out a specific task (for example a test).

Accreditation & Trade

Ladies and gentlemen,

Accreditation in the context of the emerging world trade environment plays a key role in supporting and facilitating trade. With the erosion of trade preferences, countries are now called upon to trade with their partners via a system based on competition. This paradigm shift implies that now as a country, we have clear appreciation of the need to deliver quality goods and services for all markets.

It is in this line of thought that the Mauritius Accreditation Service (more commonly known as MAURITAS) has been set up under the aegis of my Ministry to provide a uniform national accreditation service to all conformity assessment bodies operating in the country. Accredited test reports accompanying goods and services will open up market access as accreditation is the apex component in the conformity assessment infrastructure.

Accreditation & the Environment

Although it is recognized that the main objective of accreditation is to enhance trade, we should be aware that accreditation is also important for the protection of the health and safety of the population and also in the *protection of the environment*. The data that are generated by the environmental laboratories need to be *reliable* and *valid* because they are ultimately used by regulators and policy-makers in decisions that will affect the future generations.

Accreditation process -NEL

It is my understanding that the National Environmental Laboratory (NEL) has undergone the process of accreditation with MAURITAS through the steps of document review, pre-assessment and initial assessment. The process gave rise to non-conformances that were eventually cleared. A word of caution to you: obtaining accreditation is one thing and maintaining it is another thing: the hardest task now lies ahead with the maintenance of the management system that will be monitored by regular surveillance visits of MAURITAS and we have to recognize that in Mauritius we do not have a strong culture of maintenance of our assets and the institutionalization of best practices. I am happy to learn that the first surveillance of NEL is due in two weeks time.

MAURITAS - Achievements

The accreditation programme for laboratories which was launched in 2005 has yielded a total of 8 accredited laboratories in various areas supporting the economy such as textiles, sugar and jewellery. The NEL is the most recent laboratory to join the executive club of accredited laboratories.

MAURITAS - Future projects

I would like to inform you that MAURITAS is planning to issue its first accreditation certificate to a certification body in August 2009. In our ambition to be globally competitive, MAURITAS will also embark as from this year in the development of a new accreditation programme for inspection bodies and will also accelerate work towards becoming a signatory to mutual recognition arrangements at international level.

Before concluding, I take this opportunity to make a strong appeal to all the laboratories to embark on the path of accreditation and I also invite all regulators to make use of laboratories that have been deemed competent i.e accredited. Once again, let me congratulate the NEL, my colleague Hon L. Bundhoo, Minister of Environment and National Development Unit and his Ministry for this very laudable achievement.

With these concluding remarks, I thank you for your attention