

**98th Session of the International
Labour Conference
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Address by
Honorable Jean Francois Chaumière
Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honour and a privilege for me to address the 98th Session of the International Labour Conference.

This august assembly is meeting at a time of profound economic and social upheaval. We are in the grips of the worst global financial and jobs crisis the world has known since the Great Depression of the 1930s. No country, rich or poor, developed or developing, is spared. For most of us here, the crisis is fast eroding decades of painstakingly acquired development gains, undermining economies and destabilizing societies.

Faithful to the spirit of its Constitution which requires its intervention in times when the peace and harmony of the world are imperilled, the ILO is once again at the forefront, assisting Member States in finding ways to ride out of this crisis and prepare for sustainable recovery. Mr. President, I take the opportunity to congratulate the Director-General for his insightful Report entitled: ***“Tackling the global jobs crisis – Recovery through decent work policies”***.

The Director-General’s Report contains elements of a Global Jobs Pact which aims at placing employment creation and social protection at the centre of recovery policies. We welcome the proposed Global Jobs Pact which, we earnestly hope, will help mitigate the impact of the crisis on workers and their families.

Mr. President, export driven economies like Mauritius are no doubt among the more severely affected as the volume of world trade is expected to decline by over 10% due to contraction in demand. The Government of Mauritius has, over the last 12 months, been putting in place a series of measures to protect enterprises and workers from the adverse effects of this downturn in the global economy. A Stimulus Package and an Additional Stimulus Package totalling some 5.1% of the GDP have been introduced to shore up economic performance. Measures being implemented range from tax policies to transitional support to enterprises and the training and redeployment of workers whose jobs cannot be saved. Implementation of public infrastructure projects is being accelerated. Mauritius is a welfare state, where citizens enjoy, *inter-alia*, free education, free health care, social security benefits, including a non-contributory old age pension. These social safety nets are being reinforced to provide better protection to Mauritian families in these difficult times. These measures have been made possible because the wide-ranging reforms undertaken by the Government over the last 3 years have provided the necessary fiscal space.

Mr. President, the Mauritian Parliament has just voted a 6-month budget, which has a prime objective to save jobs, protect people and prepare for recovery. A Saving Jobs and Recovery Fund is being set up to finance a number of schemes, including a Mauritius Business Growth Scheme, an Emergency Export Credit Insurance Scheme and schemes to keep workers in jobs. One such scheme is the Work and Training Scheme whereby workers who are working a shorter week will be provided training on days they will not be working. The cost of the training and the basic salary of the workers during the days of training will be met from Government funds. Moreover, profit making enterprises are also being requested to align their corporate social responsibility projects with Government action to save jobs and protect people by focusing, inter-alia, on social housing, training and the promotion of micro-enterprises.

Mr. President, we have also reformed our labour laws with the assistance of the ILO. The new laws, the Employment Rights Act and the Employment Relations Act, have been proclaimed and are in force since February this year. One important measure introduced in the new Employment Rights Act is a flexi-curity scheme, the Workfare Programme, which provides assistance to laid-off workers through the payment to them of a transitional unemployment benefit and active support either to find a new job, or be trained for greater employability or start a small business. Such assistance is provided for a period of 12 months, during which the pension contributions of the worker are met under the Workfare Programme. This Programme is proving to be extremely helpful in these challenging times for the effective protection of workers.

Mr. President, notwithstanding the on-going crisis, we should not lose sight of the fact that this year marks the 90th anniversary of the International Labour Organisation. In Mauritius, a series of activities have been held, ranging from tripartite workshops on Social Dialogue and Collective Bargaining to the elaboration of our first **Decent Work Country Programme**.

Inter-alia, the Decent Work Country Programme will address the issue of **HIV/AIDS**. Mr. President, HIV/AIDS is undoubtedly the single most important and daunting health problem facing the world. It is also a major threat to the world of work as it affects the productive segment of the labour force and imposes a huge cost on enterprises through declining productivity and loss of skills and experience. Though HIV/AIDS prevalence remains low in Mauritius, the Government has taken strong measures to check the spread of this disease.

Mr. President, I would like to inform this august Assembly that Mauritius is currently engaged in the elaboration of its National Occupational Safety and Health Profile. The draft Profile has been discussed and validated by all stakeholders and is being finalised. Mauritius is

making increasing efforts to give effect to the provisions of Convention No. 155 pending its ratification.

Mr. President, coming back to the global economic and jobs crisis, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the ILO for having instituted a Committee of The Whole to discuss the whole issue. Although each country has its own specificities and there may not be a one size fits all policy prescription to steer us out of this crisis, it is clear that a truly global conscience is emerging, sensitive to the negative effects of the crisis on the social and economic fabric of societies. We are **not** responsible for the crisis and our efforts to mitigate its effects cannot be overstretched. Given its global magnitude, we require global, comprehensive and inclusive responses, which also take into account specific concerns of small and vulnerable economies. It is, therefore, gratifying that there is a strong determination on the part of all partners to find both global and country-specific solutions. The *sine qua non* for any durable solution remains, however, broad-based dialogue among all stakeholders. In that, the **ILO** must continue to guide the way.

I thank you, Mr. President.