

**Address by Mr S. C. Seeballuck**  
**Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service**

*On the occasion of the*

*Launching of the New Code of Ethics*

*For Public Officers*

*&*

*Award Ceremony of the*

*Public Service Excellence Award 2006*

**Thursday 03 May 2007 at 14 00 hours**

**Sir Harilall Vaghjee Hall**

**Colleagues Senior Chief Executives & Permanent Secretaries**

**Mr Dev Ruhee**

**Mr Chung Tick Kan**

**Distinguished Guests**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

For quite sometime now, you have been hearing a lot about the agenda for change in our Public Service. As far as I am concerned, as Head of the Civil Service, I have constantly been emphasizing the scale of the challenge lying ahead of us. I have all along been stressing on the **need for Public Sector Organisations to re-invent themselves** in order to provide the highest level of services to our citizens, a standard that calls for **absolute professionalism and commitment to quality in service delivery.**

**Colleagues,**

More than ever before, we **need to inculcate a sense of urgency** in our daily lives as civil servants. It is said that the civil service is good at responding to crisis situations. For example, we reacted promptly and effectively in dealing with the outbreak of chikungunya last year. But when it comes to our daily business, we do not show the same zeal and passion.

Last year, we received the visit of Dr Richard Norman, a Consultant from New Zealand, who made some thought-provoking comments on our civil service, which I am going to quote

*“The lack of a sense of urgency is a serious problem for the Mauritian Civil Service. A period of considerable success for Mauritius, in contrast to most nearby African states has created a **culture of complacency** and entitlement that will serve Mauritius poorly in facing the current serious economic adjustment challenges.”*

*“ The Mauritian Civil Service is one in which there appear to be few, if any, consequences for non- performance..... **no one has ever been dismissed for non-performance.....it appears to be a body in which acceptance of mediocrity has developed as part of buying peace and harmony in a small state. ”***

Unquote

Although I do not subscribe to all his thoughts, I acknowledge that there is room for improvement in several areas where we are not performing as well as we should be. We must make no mistake about that. But I can tell you now that some aspects of the current performance must, and will, improve, and sooner rather than later.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

As you are aware, the Government has set up a high level Public Sector Reforms Steering Committee under my chairmanship. This Committee is now the apex body

responsible for spearheading reform initiatives in the Public Sector. The Committee has so far met on five occasions and has already made a set of recommendations aimed at enhancing customer care and service quality, in consonance with the philosophy of *“Putting People First”*.

The most important recommendations of the Committee include:

- (i) The provision of **uninterrupted service from 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.** by all our counters which are directly serving the public, which means that the counters will continue to provide services even during lunch time;
- (ii) all Ministries and Departments which have already finalised their customer charters should arrange to have the relevant parts concerning the customers’ rights conspicuously displayed in the reception area; and
- (iii) all Ministries and Government Departments should compulsorily go for ISO certification.

The Committee is paying particular attention to two other important measures that are crucial in the modernization of the civil service. These are, firstly, the Performance Management System (PMS) and secondly, the e-Government initiative.

The PMS is already being implemented on a pilot basis in a few Ministries and progress so far has been satisfactory, despite a few teething problems in some areas which have been brought to the attention of the Committee by the Unions. The Committee is addressing these problems which are clearly problems arising out of inadequate communication at different levels.

But I would like to stress that we must proceed with the PMS, not in spite of those problems but because of them. PMS will itself improve communication – this is, in fact, one of the strengths of PMS. We have to forge ahead. There is no going back on this. I believe that even a poor start is better than no start at all. As I have said in the past, the need to measure performance goes beyond the issues of cost and

quality: it goes to the basic need for maintaining and even restoring public confidence in Government. But we need to do it in a concerted manner and with the collaboration of all our partners, especially the Trade Unions. In our complex world today, we all sink or swim together. I therefore urge upon all Supervising Officers to give their total support to this initiative. I was really glad to see the other day the enthusiasm with which PMS was met by the staff of the Agricultural Engineering Division of the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Fisheries.

The second reform measure, which has retained the attention of the Steering Committee, is the e-Government initiative. This programme, as you are aware, aims at bringing Government closer to the people by providing them with user friendly and integrated, round the clock public services on line. So far, only five Government services are accessible on line. It is intended to put some 50 other services on line by next year. However, due to some technical problems, the project has unfortunately suffered some setbacks. The success of this programme is crucial in the sense that it will make a difference in a key result area. It

will mark a watershed in the way public services have been delivered in this country. For this reason, the Steering Committee is looking into the whole issue and will come up with appropriate recommendations to get the project back on track.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

We not only have weaknesses. We also have strength. Unfortunately, while our problems make headlines and are hotly debated in the media, our successes are often just footnotes. But I know that we have in our Civil Service, a team of very capable and dedicated men and women who are discharging their duties with the highest degree of integrity and professionalism. I believe there is a need to celebrate excellence in the Civil Service, honouring teams and individuals from across the Civil Service who have made a real difference to our peoples' lives. Recognising and rewarding such shining examples of outstanding achievements is indeed a key element in creating a culture of excellence in our Civil Service.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

The need for reforms is unquestionable. However, some scholars have raised the warning flag on the risk of erosion of the fundamental values of the Civil Service in the wake of such profound changes – the risk is of throwing the baby out with the bath. I personally subscribe to the view that if we are to maintain our Civil Service as an institution of value and a force in public life, we must protect and preserve its sacrosanct character and its core values that constitute its foundation. Our traditional values of integrity, objectivity, impartiality and honesty are indeed our bed-rock. They are just as important today as when they were first developed. These values are essential to everything we do as Civil servants.

It is in this context that we have reviewed the Code of Ethics for Public Officers, setting out in greater details the standard of conduct expected of Public Officers. The revised Code seeks to uphold and further consolidate the values that

underpin our civil service and enhance public trust in the Civil Service. Public Service ethics are indeed a pre-requisite for building public trust and a keystone of good governance. The setting of clear ethical standards for the public service and provision of ethical guidance to civil servants are among the basic principles for managing ethics in the public service. I am pleased to say that this new code has been prepared by a multi-disciplinary team led by Mr Dev Ruhee, former Senior Chief Executive, with the constructive involvement of both Public officers including Trade Unions representatives and members from Private Sector organization. I seize this opportunity to thank them all for their assistance.

It is good to have such a Code, but it will serve little purpose if Public Officers are not made aware of its existence. I would therefore suggest that this new Code be made accessible to all Public Officers especially to new entrants.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

I commend the public organizations that have been confident enough to compete in the present edition of the Public Service Excellence Award. Participation in such a competition is possible only if team spirit prevails. These organizations have successfully overcome barriers to innovation and harnessed new technologies to bring about a paradigm shift in the way they operate. Inspired by a sense of common purpose, they have strived towards excellence. I know that the task of the Panel of Jury has not been an easy one and I take this opportunity to thank them for the professionalism and dedication with which they handled this assignment.

My congratulations go to the winners. To all other participants, I encourage you to try harder and compete again in the next edition of the Award. I also invite all those who have not yet participated to follow suit.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

I thank you for your time and attention.