

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND NDU
(Environment Division)

VISION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

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Preamble

- This document presents my vision and the environmental philosophy that will guide the activities of the Ministry of Environment and NDU (Environment Division) in the coming months so that the country moves closer towards the sustainable development goal. This Government has been mandated to reconstruct a new society, a new socio-economic model based on the motto “Putting People First”. This mantra will also guide the activities of the Ministry of Environment & NDU.

- Before presenting my vision and mission, I would like first of all to stress on some important issues. The first one is to send a very simple message to all Mauritians: **the long-term economic success of our small island is not possible without environmental sustainability**. Protecting the environment, delivering social justice and creating a healthy economy are the three basic pillars underlying the concept of sustainable development (or “developpement durable”). The terms of “ecology” and “environment” are generally well known to the public and are

usually assimilated to nature protection and aesthetic aspects. But the sustainable development concept is still not well understood by the population at large and remains for the time being confined to specialists. Economic development, social justice and environmental protection must go hand in hand. Sustainable development consists of adopting new production and consumption patterns and it demands deep rooted changes at the individual level as well as at the collective and institutional level. It will not be surprising that a majority of Mauritians have not heard of or do not understand the sustainable development concept. One of the key objectives during my mandate is to enable the public to make the link between the three pillars of Sustainable Development (economy, environment and social) and to understand that the sustainability of Mauritius will improve if each one of us can modify our habits and make more environmentally friendly choices.

- The second point I want to make is that environment is no longer only about putting a stop to local sources of pollution or only about cleaning-up campaigns. These are of course important. But environment has become a complex issue. Everything is inter-connected. It calls for deep-rooted changes and for action at all levels: from public to private, consumer to producer, global to local. Environment is nowadays a key driver of creativity, of innovation and of competitiveness around the world. Countries that fail to integrate both environmental and economic factors will not position themselves well to improve, or even to maintain, the quality of life of their people. This is one of the most important issues for our country today as we restructure our economy, upgrade our

infrastructure and identify new engines of economic growth such as the Tourism industry, Integrated Resort Schemes, ICT sector, Sea Food Hub, Ethanol production, Aquaculture, etc.

- As a small island, our most precious resources are land, water (especially our groundwater resources), the coastal zone/ lagoon ecosystem which include coral reefs, our biodiversity and our human resources. Our efforts are basically geared to protect these natural resources and our public health by managing the pressures generated during our development process. I personally consider that our main environmental problems are those related to land use planning, water availability and quality, the increasing pressure on our coastal zone due to residential development and the tourism industry, unsustainable production and consumption, solid wastes management and the high reliance on fossil fuel in our economy.

- There are two projects which, for me as Minister of Environment, I am keen that we start and complete as soon as possible. The first one is on the 'IDENTIFICATION AND DEMARCATION OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS IN MAURITIUS AND RODRIGUES'. Such projects have the ultimate goal of protecting and conserving the environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs) of Mauritius and Rodrigues, such as forests, wetlands, mountain slopes, water catchment areas, etc. This should designate once and for all the areas earmarked for conservation where development will not be permitted. The second

project is the 'DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTEGRATED COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT (ICZM) FRAMEWORK'. The overall goal of this project is to promote the sustainable use and development of our coastal zone. The main objectives of the project is to develop a Strategy Plan for ICZM in Mauritius which will be in line with government policies and multilateral environmental agreements, to prepare a comprehensive legislative framework , and to prepare a national ICZM plan to guide future development in the coastal zone. This is important as we further develop our tourism industry.

- As I have said before, the architecture of our economy is changing. We are relying more and more on the tourism sector (which will put increasing pressure on our coastal zone) and we are moving from highly visible industrial companies towards the more hidden services sector and SMEs. We want to attract foreigners to settle on the island through the IRS scheme, and environmental quality will be one of the criteria they will choose before moving. Consumerism is on the rise, bringing with it higher resources consumption and waste generation. It is now the right time to have a new environmental policy. We will publish a White paper by March, which is intended to stimulate discussion that will assist government in arriving at this new national environmental policy. The White paper will indicate critical issues that need to be addressed. We will request all stakeholders to assist us by studying the white paper and contribute their comments. The development of this new environmental policy will be a combined effort which should reflect the inputs of all stakeholders. The new environmental policy should also integrate

all regional and international commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals, the Johannesburg Plan of Action, and the Mauritius Strategy for SIDS, etc. The policy will then help us to review our National Environment Strategy and Action Plan for the medium term. Consultants are in the process of being recruited for this assignment.

- In parallel to the development of this new policy, we will have to improve the institutional set up at the Ministry to arrive at concrete results. There is a need to re-organise the departments of the Ministry in order to be more pragmatic and fulfill our mission. I have set up a committee to look at this re-organisation.

- Section 10 of the EPA Act of 2002 makes provision for the establishment of a National Network for Sustainable Development. The objectives of the NNSD are to act as a forum of discussion and consultation on environmental issues. I note with concern that, since 2002 when the EPA act was proclaimed, this network had never been established. This National Network for Sustainable Development has now been set up and will start work as soon as possible. This will be a major tool that my ministry will use for consultation and advice from all stakeholders.

- My last point, before coming to my vision and mission, is that government will continue to take the lead in encouraging environmental awareness. We will make Mauritians conscious of the need to change bad habits and drive the message that the environment is every citizen's responsibility. But the scene will need to

evolve however with time-NGOs, Media, Private Sector; Local Governments etc must also take the lead. We need to slowly move away from government led campaigns towards a more collaborative approach. The emphasis is to urge individuals to take responsibility for the environment and encouraging everybody to drive activities. The relationship between Government and NGOs need to evolve from one of consultation to cooperation and then co-leadership.

Let me now come to my vision, mission and environmental philosophy and concrete activities we will be doing.

VISION

Mauritius reaches environmental sustainability and we have a clean and healthy environment that Mauritians are proud of.

MISSION

To enable our Republic to attain the highest level of environmental quality as a means to enhance the quality of life of Mauritians, preserve our natural environment and advance our competitiveness. This will be achieved through continued innovation and vibrant partnerships and collaboration with all stakeholders.

During this mission, we will adopt the following environmental philosophy:

- **We will focus on visible results-making our air, freshwater and lagoon waters, and land of better quality and making Mauritius greener.**
- **Our policies will encourage sustainable consumption and production as well as the development of an environment industry**
- **We will use the best science and data to inform our decision making**
- **We will continue to increase environmental awareness and build a Mauritian ethics of personal responsibility through education and voluntary initiatives**
- **Environmental protection efforts will not be the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Environment – government departments, local governments, local communities, NGOs, media and individuals will be involved.**
- **Mauritius will continue to adhere to the international code of conduct through relevant conventions and protocols.**

ACTIVITIES

We will translate the above philosophy into concrete projects. Let me now highlight activities that my ministry has already initiated and that we will soon initiate under each one of the mentioned 6 principles.

The newsletter enclosed in your kit highlights the main activities undertaken by the Environment arm of my Ministry during the past six months.

Besides these activities, my Ministry has also been involved on a day to day basis in pollution control, processing of EIA and PER applications, enforcement of the EPA, coastal zone management and coordination of several projects. For the last six months, the Police de L'Environnement has established 2229 contraventions (including illegal littering, dumping, road traffic offences etc), issued 3001 notices to drivers of vehicles emitting black smoke and has attended and solved 1842 complaints out of 2303. The Pollution Prevention and Control Division has received 650 complaints and has solved 619 cases. The Environment Assessment Division has received 41 EIA applications and has issued 30 licenses. The Preliminary Environment Report (PER) Unit of the same division has received 68 PER applications of which 41 have been approved.

From July 2005 to date some 10 clean up campaigns have been organized geared towards sensitization of the public.

Let me now focus on the activities in the coming months under each one of the mentioned principles.

Principle 1: We will focus on visible results-making our air, fresh and lagoon waters, and land of better quality - and making Mauritius greener.

- As I have mentioned before, we will have a new environmental policy during the year and we will then revisit the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) .Our environment legislation will be based on the belief that environmental standards will stimulate desirable behaviour, innovation and business opportunities.
- My Ministry has just finalized the review of Ambient and Emission Air Standards as well as Fuel standards for vehicles. We have already started procedures for enacting these new standards.
- We will strengthen the enforcement capacity of my Ministry through recruitment of more technical staff and through continuous capacity building of officers of the Ministry and those of the Police de L'Environnement. Presently about 30 police officers are policing the environment. It is my intention to ensure that the whole police force-i.e. around 7000 police officers- contribute to the protection of the environment. It's part of their job. A networking between the Police de l'Environnement and all the local police stations will be established.
- In order to attend complaints more effectively and rapidly, officers from CAB Office have been trained on environmental issues, so that they are able to register complaints and channel same to the relevant enforcing Agency for prompt action.

They will be also actively involved in sensitization and awareness campaign and organization and participation in clean up programmes. This is part of their job.

- In addition to those functions attributed to CAB Office, the local authorities will also be called to play a more important role in pollution control, environmental management and development control. In view of their close proximity to complainants, and in line with the policy to decentralize enforcement of environmental laws, officers of any local authority will be empowered to act as authorised officers under the EPA, and could therefore make use of the enforcement mechanism (such as issue of notices) as provided in the Act.

- Regarding littering, we are working on a fixed penalty regulation for offenders. Effective enforcement of any litter law should be the joint responsibility of the Ministry of Environment, local authorities and the police and relies on partnership and co-operation between these different groups.

- The distribution of advertising leaflets is becoming an issue. People who commission the production of advertising materials should take reasonable steps to ensure that material does not become litter. We will be working on a regulation to tackle this problem. The regulation should also make it an offence to deliver unsolicited advertising material where a sign clearly indicates that material is unwanted (that is a 'no junk mail' sign or 'no advertising material' sign is present), thereby enabling enforcement agencies to act on behalf of their communities. All

this is intended to promote responsibility within the advertising distribution industry.

- Promoters and organizers of major events will be required to ensure that they have litter control measures in place at the venue before, during and after the event. This applies to football matches, concerts and any event where large crowds gather. Before giving permits we will ensure that the promoter does the clean up afterwards.
- Posters, banners, dumping of bulky waste or vehicle wrecks etc, are some of the most common environmental eyesores in the country. There is a need for a clear-cut policy decision on the abatement of eyesores as powers to control eyesores are scattered among various legislations. We are working on a regulation that would allow the Ministry of Environment to also monitor and enforce any provisions on eyesores under the EPA Act.
- Concerning the use of Plastics in electoral campaigns, I can assure you all that there will be no use of plastics in future elections.
- The Ministry of Environment & NDU in collaboration with the Traffic Management Unit is now controlling the smoke emissions from vehicles through opacity testing. The Ministry of Environment & NDU has already purchased portable smoke opacity meters for the control of vehicular emissions and from now

on there will be no need to send vehicles to the NTA. The meter will tell us if there is compliance or not.

- Concerning the activities of the Living Environment Unit of the Ministry-We have “democratized” its activities in all 20 constituencies instead of doing only a few “projets de prestige” in one or two constituencies. These “projets de prestige” absorb all budgets at the detriment of other regions.

Principle 2: Our policies will encourage sustainable consumption and production as well as the development of an environment industry.

- The Johannesburg summit in 2002 emphasized that the major cause of the deterioration of the global environment is **unsustainable consumption and production**. We need the Cleaner Production concept introduced in our industry and we also need to encourage Sustainable Consumption patterns.
- Cleaner Production is a **win-win** strategy for our businesses, especially with the rising price of raw materials and energy. My Ministry is currently working with the NPCC on the setting up of a **National Cleaner Production Center (NCPC)** and I am going to Cabinet next week to get the vetting and implement the Center. The major role of the center would be to help our industries in shifting towards more efficient and sustainable patterns of production. This is especially relevant with the increase in price of oil and other raw materials.

- Production and Consumption are the two sides of the same coin and focusing on one while neglecting the other one doesn't make sense. I want to underline here the role of consumers in the process of achieving sustainable development. Every individual can make a difference to the environment in the choices he or she makes in daily life. We have started work on a communication strategy to influence consumers towards desirable behaviours.

- Given a greater emphasis and demand for environmental solutions, **the environmental industry** has become a growth sector in many regions of the world. We can expect to see more jobs being created in the environmental industry in Mauritius, as the demands for environmental solutions continue to pick up in our local market and in our region. We will renew our effort with the private sector to formalize this industry and encourage investment in it We will encourage the creation of an **Environment Industry Association of Mauritius**, which should be a private sector initiative for mutual assistance and collaboration among industry players.

- There is still much we need to do to make recycling our way of life. We need to move away from a "Use and Throw" society to a "3R" society-Reduce Reuse and Recycle. In collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government we are working on a pragmatic recycling policy for Mauritius, with clear targets. There are various categories of wastes that can be recycled, such as food waste, paper/cardboard, construction and demolition wastes, plastics, glass, wood, metals, scrap tyres, electronic equipment, textiles, used oil, ash, batteries, etc. Investments in recycling

activities will not only enable us to conserve resources, but also offer us a new growth industry for us to create new employment opportunities for our people. The public sector is also itself a major consumer. Through its market power it can help shape market conditions by applying environmental criteria and goals to their procurement policies and help the use of green products and recycling. We will work out a **green procurement policy** for government.

- I consider the present Plastic Carrier Bag Regulations to be ineffective. We are not addressing the root cause of the problem which is unsustainable consumption. People tend to believe that plastic bags have no costs and use a lot of them whereas the true costs of bags is included in the price of items without knowledge to the customer. The use of biodegradable plastics also makes people tend to believe that discarded plastics will disappear -this actually leads to an increase in plastic waste. I am setting up a Technical Committee to formulate a new Plastic Bag regulation after agreement between all parties concerned.

- We will encourage the private sector to measure and audit its environmental performance and publicly report it on a continual basis. **A Mauritian Environmental Reporting Award** will serve to recognise companies which have demonstrated keen concern for the environment and have reported it in its annual report.

Principle 3: We will use the best science and data to inform our decision making

- We need better science to inform our decision making and there will be a stronger collaboration with the academic and research community to answer new research questions about the state of our environment. I have already started collaboration with the MIE and other institutions for research on the state of our environment.
- The Environmental Information System is now taking shape. Through this information system my ministry will aim to **publish sustainable development indicators** - to provide a basis on which our progress can be judged.
- The Government will strengthen environmental monitoring systems and the operation of the National Environmental Laboratory. Continuous monitoring of the state of the environment will provide a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of our policies and the need for changes.
- Access to information is a basic democratic right, and the state of the environment report is an important means of providing it to the public. We will have a new state of environment Report by June this year. **A new website "State of the Environment in Mauritius"** will also be ready by that time. This will be a major tool for providing information and also help in environmental education. This website will also provide for internet surveys to help us get public feedback on our policies and activities.

Principle 4: We will continue to increase environmental awareness and build a Mauritian ethics of personal responsibility through education and voluntary initiatives.

- We aim for an environmental consciousness that will mature into personal responsibility for civic commitment to the environment. And what better way it is than to start with the young, who will inherit the future of this country. We believe in an early start to environmental awareness. If we can foster a sustained interest in environmental volunteerism in our young, we would have laid a good foundation for a generation of Mauritians who are more conscious and engaged towards our environment. We will work hard over the months and years to come to engage youths of all ages on issues pertaining to the environment and we will spearhead environmental activism in all educational institutions in Mauritius. A preliminary action plan regarding environmental education has already been prepared and we have recruited an adviser to specifically work on its implementation. The Composting project in schools forms part of this action plan.
- We will build new partnerships with NGOs. I have noted that there has been no systematic consultation with NGOs over the past five years. I am convinced that we can develop a good partnership with NGOs through collaborative projects and sensitization campaigns. We will work with NGOs so that they take a lead role in environmental protection and educating the consumer on Sustainable Consumption

patterns. I have fixed a meeting with the NGOs in February and we will invite them to come up with projects.

The role of the MEDIA and their importance in communicating about sustainable development, information for the public and in setting consumption patterns are also critical to change.

- There is a latent expectation from the population to be more involved in environmental protection efforts. For the World Environment Day this year, with the theme of Combating Desertification, besides other activities I am launching a Tree Planting campaign called: *Plant a Million Tree*. I hope to see all stakeholders participating in this event.
- We must also recognize role models in our society- we will launch an Award scheme to recognize outstanding individuals, organizations and companies that are role models of environmental protection.

Principle 5: Environmental protection efforts are not the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Environment - local governments, local communities and individuals must be included.

- Close partnership among the private sector, government and civil society is crucial in our mission. The MOE is a network facilitator, fostering closer relationships with all stakeholders to strengthen and deepen the message of environmental sustainability.

- Environment, by its very nature, is a cross-cutting issue. Protecting and improving our environment is not just the job of the Environment Minister - **it is the job of everyone**. Environment cuts across the interests and mandates of all government departments. Because government coherence on sustainable development is essential, these kinds of issues must be addressed in all departmental strategies. Every ministry should be involved and environment need to be considered and mainstreamed within their work at both planning and implementation stages. I will aim to strengthen the integration of environment as a cross-cutting issue in government development efforts.
- We strongly believe in the slogan “**Think Globally Act locally**” and aim to put it into practice—so as to encourage everyone to do something to help the environment. On the principle that local environmental problems should as a general rule be solved locally, the local government must be given independent responsibilities in some areas, such as environmental education and waste recycling. Through local Agenda 21 work, the Government wishes to continue and strengthen local participation in environmental policy. Local authorities are closer to the inhabitants to allow participatory approaches. I plan to meet all the Mayors and Presidents of District Councils soon to see how my Ministry can help them to come up with a local Agenda 21 plan.

- In the amendment to the EPA Act, we are empowering local authorities for enforcement and issue notices. I expect that they will assume their role fully in that respect. I will see to it personally that each enforcing agency plays its role properly instead of centralizing everything in my Ministry.

Principle 6: Mauritius will continue to adhere to the international code of conduct through relevant conventions and protocols.

- Mauritius has always been at the forefront regarding **International Commitments**. We will work towards further development of international cooperation and Mauritius will continue to play its part on the global arena by adhering to the international code of conduct through relevant conventions and protocols.
- We will be implementing this year the recommendations of the National Implementation Plan for the management of **Persistent organic pollutants (POPs)** under the **Stockholm** Convention. The National Climate Change Action Plan is currently being reviewed and a National Adaptation Programme will be worked out this year.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Mauritius as a SIDS, will continue to face its own unique challenges in balancing both its economic and social progress while achieving environmental sustainability. Sustaining the environment requires vigilance, action and innovation. But although environmental management is a responsibility cutting across society - as a collective effort it requires leadership. My Ministry will provide the leadership. I open a new chapter for us all in our quest for environmental sustainability-a chapter of responsibility, partnership and implementation. The Citizen's Charter we have prepared, which you will find in your kit, is a testimony of our commitment to the Mauritian population.