

ADDRESS BY
DR. THE HONOURABLE ARVIN BOOLELL,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND
INTERNATIONAL TRADE

VIN D'HONNEUR

MARITIM HOTEL, 22 DECEMBER 2008

**Secretary for Foreign Affairs,
Your Excellency Mrs. Olga Ivanova, Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,
Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Missions and Representatives of Regional and
International Organizations,
The Honorary Consuls General and Honorary Consuls,
The Staff of my Ministry
Distinguished Guests,**

I am very pleased to welcome you to the traditional Vin d'Honneur hosted at the end of each year by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade.

During this year, we have witnessed new arrivals as well as departures at the level of Heads of Missions. In this regard, I would like to extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Madumane Matabane, High Commissioner of South Africa; His Excellency Mr. Ghulam Farid Farrukh, High Commissioner of Pakistan; His Excellency Mr. Madhusudan Ganapati, High Commissioner of India; His Excellency Mr. Callixte d'Offay, Secretary-General of the Indian Ocean Commission; and His Excellency Mr. Morteza Sarmadi, Executive Director of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation.

I would also like to welcome in our midst five newly appointed Honorary Consuls: Mr. Guillaume N'Da Kouamé representing Côte d'Ivoire, Mr. Sheikh Basheer Tagauly representing Comoros, Mr. Tim Taylor representing Norway, Mr. Raj Gaya representing Benin, and Mr. Saleem Rashid Beebeejaun representing Malaysia.

I have a special thought for our Embassies, Consuls and Honorary Consuls abroad whose efforts in enhancing the visibility of Mauritius around the world and in providing assistance to Mauritian nationals overseas are appreciated.

I am pleased to announce that a special meeting of all our Honorary Consuls abroad will be held towards mid-March 2009. This meeting will help consolidate our economic ties with their respective countries and give an opportunity to address issues of concern to the Honorary Consuls.

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

Local and International Context

The year 2008 has been a year of major challenges, namely an unprecedented food crisis, the international financial meltdown and a looming global recession, an energy crisis including the effects of volatile petroleum prices, and environmental problems. And yet again, terrorism has manifested itself in the most cruel manner.

Mauritius has been able to avoid the direct impact of the international economic meltdown through the pursuit of economic reforms initiated in 2006 under the able leadership of the Hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam. When this Government took power in July 2005, it inherited an economy in a precarious state with growth on a downward path, unemployment at its highest level in 20 years, a drop in investments and almost inexistent foreign direct investment. This economic decline has been successfully halted by the imaginative and bold reform measures implemented by the Government with a view to restructuring and modernizing the economy and improving the lives of our citizens. Our economy is now on an upward swing, unemployment has diminished and FDI has visibly soared. The achievements of the reform have been acknowledged internationally. Lately, the European Commissioner for Development His Excellency, Mr Louis Michel and the European Commissioner for Agriculture, Her Excellency, Mrs Mariam Fischer Boel have also praised Mauritius for the ongoing implementation of its economic reform programme.

Our in-built resilience has helped us to stay the course in the face of external shocks. We are expecting this year a growth rate of around 5.2%, the creation of over 10,000 jobs, and an increase in investment for the third consecutive year. Fully conscious, however, of the unpredictability of events unfolding on the international scene, Government has come up last week-end with a new package of measures as a stimulus for economic operators and for our citizens at the bottom of the ladder who will most require our support. Over the next two years, we will spend an additional amount of 10.4 billion rupees to support traditional sectors of our economy such as sugar, manufacturing and tourism, emerging sectors such as the seafood hub and ICT, SMEs, infrastructure development as well as to protect the weaker sections of the population. Indeed, let me say that the objective of this Government is to boost economic growth and strengthen resilience, preserve employment and alleviate poverty.

Let me recall that Mauritius is not only a small island developing State with inherent vulnerabilities, but also a net food-importing country and a net energy importer. It will therefore be difficult for us to tackle alone all the daunting challenges that confront us. Indeed, Mauritius will need the support and assistance of all its external partners in all its endeavours. I would like to seize this opportunity to thank all our Development partners for the cooperation readily extended to us and we look forward to pursuing our work together.

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

The terrorist acts around the world this year have left us traumatized and in particular, the recent terrorist attacks in Mumbai. The Mumbai attacks claimed the lives of many citizens from India as well as from other countries. We, in Mauritius, were aggrieved by the loss of the former Chief Executive Officer of the State Bank of Mauritius, Mr. Chaitlall Gunness. We share in the grief of his family and in the grief of all other bereaved families. We would like to reiterate our sympathy and solidarity with the Indian government and its people in the wake of this tragedy. The Mumbai attacks have again highlighted the need for concerted international action to fight terrorism. Mauritius unreservedly condemns terrorism and will continue to work with the international community to combat this scourge in all its forms and manifestations. In this regard, our National Assembly recently passed the Prevention of Terrorism (International Obligations) Act with a view to strengthening our capacity to ward off terrorist attacks. In May this year, Mauritius became a partner of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. We propose to adhere in the near future to other international counter-terrorism instruments.

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

Regional Integration

When we met last September following my appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, I underscored the growing importance that Mauritius attaches to regional integration. Our regional initiatives should be viewed in the context of our endeavours within the African Union for overall economic development of the African continent.

We have actively contributed this year to advancing the regional integration process through the launch of the SADC Free Trade Area in August last and the ongoing preparations for the launch of the COMESA Customs Union in the first quarter of 2009.

As a strong proponent of regional integration, Mauritius believes that infrastructure development in the region is crucial for taking this process forward. Mauritius has been chosen to host the COMESA Fund which will have as one of its components an Infrastructure Facility. During my recent visit to Brussels, I was assured by the EU Commissioner for Development that additional resources to finance adjustment costs will be channelled through a separate window in the COMESA Fund. In this regard, we as ESA countries should stand ready to submit priority projects for funding by the EC.

In April this year, Mauritius successfully hosted the SADC International Conference on Poverty and Development. The Conference adopted a Declaration which identifies seven priority areas requiring urgent attention, namely food security, climate change, energy, trade, education, health and infrastructure development. I am happy to note that action has already been initiated for the setting up of a regional poverty

observatory and the development of a Regional Action Plan on Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development. As recommended by the Conference, a joint Ministerial Task Force on Food Security, comprising SADC Ministers of Finance, Trade and Agriculture, met in Lusaka in July 2008 to address concerns arising from the food crisis.

Mauritius has played an important role in promoting the notion of an enlarged Free Trade Area that would bring together COMESA, SADC and the East African Community. This proposal which received the endorsement of the First Tripartite Summit of Heads of State and Government of COMESA, EAC and SADC held last October in Kampala, will be an effective vehicle to build bridges among the three regional blocs. The ensuing harmonization of their trade policies will no doubt help boost intra-regional trade and pave the way for a single market.

The IOR-ARC, spanning countries in the African, Gulf and Asian regions, constitutes a platform for dialogue on economic cooperation. Mauritius is keen, along with other Member States, to unlock the trade and investment opportunities in the IOR-ARC region. Discussions have started on the possibility of establishing a Preferential Trade Area between the countries of the region.

Mauritius acceded to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as Observer last August and looks forward to working closely with the members of this organization to promote regional cooperation.

Excellences et distingués invités,

Si depuis sa création en 1984, la Commission de l'océan Indien a contribué à renforcer de manière significative la coopération entre ses membres, les Comores, les Seychelles, Madagascar, Maurice et la Réunion, notre organisation régionale est désormais appelée à assumer un rôle encore plus prégnant dans la défense et la promotion des intérêts des îles du sud-ouest de l'océan Indien. En effet, S.E. Monsieur Louis Michel, Commissaire de l'Union européenne, et moi-même partageons l'opinion que la COI doit s'atteler à une mission d'intégration et conséquemment, les activités de la COI doivent être revues à la hausse.

Je suis heureux que le commissaire Michel soutient l'idée que j'ai exprimée pour que la COI soit mandatée pour élaborer un programme régional de sécurité alimentaire financé par l'Union européenne. En effet, nous voulons voir la COI encore plus proactive dans ce domaine, ainsi que dans ceux de l'énergie, des technologies de l'information et de la communication – dont les bandes larges – de même que dans la surveillance régionale, surtout en vue de combattre la pêche illicite, non réglementée et non reportée.

Eu égard au rôle croissant de la COI dans le développement et le renforcement de la coopération entre ses Etats-membres, j'ai l'honneur d'annoncer aujourd'hui que le Gouvernement de Maurice va fournir à la COI une assistance financière en vue de permettre à son Secrétariat d'avoir des locaux plus spacieux.

Je voudrais saisir cette occasion pour saluer l'importante contribution de la France aux activités de la COI.

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

European Union

The EU remains a privileged Development partner of Mauritius. On 12 November this year, a visa waiver agreement between Mauritius and the European Commission was initialled. It is most likely that the signature of this agreement will take place in Mauritius at the end of February 2009. It is expected that the EU side will be represented by the Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security, Mr. Jacques Barrot. We are looking to conclude similar agreements with Iceland, Norway and Switzerland, countries which are part of the Schengen Area but are non-EU Member States. We trust that such agreements will help increase mobility and exchanges between Mauritius and these countries, in particular the EU countries.

In the course of this year, negotiations have been pursued by Mauritius and other countries of the Eastern and Southern African Group with the EU for the conclusion of a full and comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. It would be recalled that an interim EPA with the EU was initialled last December. This interim EPA is to be signed **in Mauritius** by the end of April 2009. Commissioner Louis Michel has accepted in principle to visit Mauritius for the signing ceremony. This event will be preceded by a joint ESA-EC Ministerial Meeting to be co-chaired by Baroness Ashton, EU Commissioner for Trade.

We hope that the EU will honour its pledge to ensure that EPAs are instruments for development through trade. Adequate resources should be provided by the EU in a predictable manner for the implementation of the interim EPA. In this regard, an EPA Fund should quickly be established to channel EPA related resources needed to implement the EPA cost adjustment and capacity building. It is not yet possible to conclude a full and comprehensive EPA in view of inadequate progress in the negotiations. We will therefore pursue the negotiations with the EU in 2009.

In this context, the last ACP Summit held in Ghana in October 2008 decided that a high-level delegation comprising the President of ACP Summit and the Chairpersons of the African Union, CARIFORUM and the Pacific region should engage with the European Commission and the EU Member states on the EPA. The objective being to canvass support of the European Commission and EU Member States on the development dimension of the EPA as well as contentious issues in the EPA negotiations. The ACP is awaiting dates for a meeting with the Commission and EU Member States. We hope that this high-level meeting can take place as soon as possible.

Let me indicate here that, at the level of the Joint ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly, a common position has been reached between Mauritius, Seychelles and

Madagascar to pursue the issue of global sourcing and onshore processing of tuna for duty and quota-free access to the EU. We trust that the EU will respond positively to this common request and hence give a significant boost to the development of the seafood hub.

Alongside the EPA negotiations, our interaction with the EU is being actively pursued. At the ACP Council meeting held last week in Brussels, the Council endorsed the regional allocation of sugar under the EPA. This decision has been conveyed to the EU side to ensure that our quota for sugar exports to the EU is safeguarded.

In the context of intra-ACP programmes to be financed under the 10th EDF, the ACP Council agreed to include the ACP Textile Facility for the textile sector.

Further, my proposal to the ACP Council to create an Agricultural and Food Security Facility in the context of the five yearly review which will take place next year has been agreed to.

I wish also to point out that Mauritius has submitted a regional project for financing under the one billion euro facility set up by the European Commission to address food security problems. I had the opportunity to raise the matter with Commissioner Louis Michel who has agreed to look into the possibility of financing the project.

We are also pleased that our consultations with the EU on the issue of cold chain for fishery products are moving smoothly.

WTO Negotiations

The numerous challenges that I have evoked and in particular, the international financial crisis and the food crisis compel us all to seek a revitalization of the Doha Development Round. We are supportive of Mr. Pascal Lamy's initiative to put back the negotiations on track and commend him for his efforts. We agree that once the new US Administration is in office, the priority should be to garner common political will for a balanced and equitable outcome on agriculture and NAMA.

The negotiations should progress on the basis of what has already been achieved and should ensure an outcome that provides sufficient flexibilities to cater for the needs and concerns of small and vulnerable economies like ours. We remain fully committed to the Doha Development Agenda and will continue to contribute constructively to the negotiations.

Talking of long, drawn-out multilateral negotiations brings to the fore the issue of climate change. Although climate change continues to pose a serious global threat to mankind, particularly to small island States, calls to address this important issue have not been very successful. There is however new hope that this problem will be given due

attention and that the Post-Kyoto Protocol would be a truly universal one, containing mandatory obligations to reduce greenhouse gases.

Excellences et distingués invités,

Bilateral Relations

Nos relations bilatérales avec nos partenaires traditionnels – représentés par vous tous ici, ont toujours occupé une place importante dans notre diplomatie. Nous continuerons à oeuvrer en faveur du renforcement de nos liens existants.

En juin 2008, le Premier ministre de Maurice s'est rendu en visite d'Etat en France, dans le cadre de nos longues et excellentes relations d'amitié avec ce grand pays. Durant ses rencontres avec le Président Sarkozy et les autorités françaises, le Premier ministre a obtenu de la France qu'elle nous soutienne dans nombre de secteurs, tels la modernisation de nos services de police, de nos capacités de faire face aux désastres naturels que sont les tempêtes et les tsunamis, ou encore les traitements des eaux usées. Le Premier ministre a, lors de sa visite, aussi obtenu l'assurance du plein soutien de la France dans le cadre de la mise en chantier du projet 'Maurice Ile durable'. Cette visite a aussi vu la signature d'accords entre la France et Maurice portant sur la sécurité intérieure et l'extension de l'aéroport international Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam.

La rencontre entre le Premier ministre et le Président Sarkozy nous a aussi permis de faire une avancée majeure sur la question de Tromelin. En effet, Port-Louis a accueilli les 17 et 18 décembre derniers une réunion de haut niveau de fonctionnaires mauriciens et français. Lors de cette réunion, qui s'est déroulée dans une atmosphère très cordiale et constructive, les délégations mauricienne et française ont eu l'occasion, entre autres, de discuter de la cogestion de Tromelin et ont convenu de la mise sur pied d'un Comité de cogestion de haut niveau. Une autre réunion aura lieu en mars 2009.

Nous nous félicitons aussi de la signature en septembre avec la France d'un Accord de migration circulaire, grâce auquel des citoyens mauriciens, travailleurs qualifiés ou ouvriers spécialisés, pourront trouver de l'emploi, à titre temporaire, dans nombre de secteurs en France. De plus, cet accord fournira à nombre de Mauriciens, qu'ils soient étudiants, internes ou jeunes professionnels, l'occasion d'acquérir une expérience en adéquation avec les défis de demain. Je ne saurais ici passer sous silence l'effort soutenu du gouvernement mauricien de mettre en place la migration circulaire afin de mettre à profit le capital humain dont dispose le pays, pour le bien de tous les Mauriciens. C'est ainsi que nous avons, en septembre dernier, accueilli à Maurice un atelier de travail sur les bénéfices au développement découlant de la migration circulaire, durant lequel les participants venant de divers pays ont eu l'occasion de partager leurs expériences dans ce domaine. Maurice a aussi signé des accords, notamment les 'Temporary Worker Programmes', avec les compagnies canadiennes Maple Leafside Foods et Lakeside Packers, qui offrent à des citoyens mauriciens de trouver des emplois temporaires dans l'industrie agro-alimentaire canadienne.

Il est à noter que cet Accord de migration circulaire que nous avons conclu avec la France a été présenté comme un modèle de coopération Nord-Sud lors de la Seconde Conférence ministérielle euro-africaine sur la migration et le développement qui s'est déroulée à Paris en novembre dernier. Plusieurs ministres participant à la conférence ont sollicité plus d'informations sur le modèle mauricien. J'ai également eu des discussions avec S.E M. Brice Hortefeux, Ministre de l'Immigration, de l'Intégration, de l'Identité nationale et du Développement solidaire de même qu'avec M. Patrick Stefanini, Secrétaire Général du Ministère de l'Immigration. Je suis heureux de vous annoncer qu'une délégation française sera à Maurice en janvier 2009 dans le cadre du suivi de la mise en application de l'Accord.

Par ailleurs, Maurice espère conclure des accords similaires avec le Québec et avec d'autres Etats.

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

Mauritius and the United Kingdom continue to entertain excellent relations, based on historical ties and the commonality of our democratic institutions. We were pleased to welcome this year several distinguished personalities from the British Parliament and are eager to continue this inter-parliamentary dialogue next year. We are pleased to note that the UK is one of the biggest sources of investment to Mauritius.

It is the earnest wish of Mauritius that the issue of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago be addressed as both Mauritius and the UK continue to maintain their respective position on this question. We are pleased that the British Government has agreed to hold discussions with the Government of Mauritius in January 2009.

The US Administration should be sensitive to the legitimate sovereignty claim of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago.

We are thankful to the United States for the granting of the third country fabric derogation to Mauritius until 2012. This derogation comes at a particularly critical juncture for our textile and apparel industry as it prepares itself to become more globally competitive. We also highly appreciate the assistance of the US Government for our economic diversification efforts in areas such as the seafood sector, fancy food, land-based oceanic industry, and information and communication technology. Our dialogue under the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement signed in September 2006 has been ongoing and has laid the groundwork for negotiations on a Bilateral Investment Treaty. We hope to conclude a Bilateral Investment Treaty with the United States in the near future.

The Presidential elections in the United States of America this year captured people's imagination and left the world breathless. Once again, the people of the United States showed the world that their country was a living example of democracy in action, a country of liberties and equal opportunities. We look forward to the further consolidation of our relations with the United States under the new Obama Administration.

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

Our relations with India have always been warm and privileged. India continues to be our major cooperation partner and generously assists Mauritius in its development. The honour bestowed upon the Honourable Prime Minister during his visit to India earlier this year in the context of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2008; his official visit to the State of Bihar; and in particular, the setting up in Patna of the statue of the Father of the Nation, late Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, are all testimony to the special ties that bind our two countries.

On the economic front, Mauritius and India had a successful Joint Commission meeting which opened yet another line of credit that will allow for the implementation of projects linked to maritime security and surveillance. We are also engaged with India in negotiations for the conclusion of a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement which is expected to provide a new dimension to the existing relations between the two countries. It is essential that a new impetus be given to the negotiations so that this Agreement can be concluded at the earliest.

Mauritius and Pakistan share a special bond of friendship based on common cultural heritage and ties of kinship. With a new Government in power, following elections in Pakistan this year, we trust that bilateral relations between our two countries will be further strengthened. We were pleased to welcome to Mauritius last August a team of Pakistani eye surgeons led by Dr. Wajid Ali Khan. Some fifty Mauritian patients benefited from this mission.

We note with satisfaction the new momentum in our bilateral relations with China, one of our most important development partners. We reiterate our appreciation to the Chinese Government for selecting Mauritius as host for one of the five trade and economic zones announced by President Hu Jintao. As we are all aware, this zone will soon take off and will host a range of Chinese companies and industries. We appreciate the faith of the Chinese Government in the dynamism of our economy and are pleased that the establishment of the zone is well on track. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate China for successfully hosting the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Mauritius will forever remember the 2008 Games as it was the first time that we won a medal at the Olympiads.

Mauritius has continued to benefit from an increased number of Chinese scholarships. We have also received very high-level visits from China, including members of the Chinese Political Bureau. The line of credit granted to us by China will allow us to implement a number of important infrastructure projects such as the extension of the airport, the building of the headquarters of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation and the Verdun highway.

Mauritius has actively participated in the China-Africa Forum and looks forward to the Ministerial meeting which will be held in Cairo next year. We are equally preparing an effective participation of Mauritius in the 2010 Shanghai World Expo.

Our long-standing relations with Russia have shown great potential for growth in recent years, given the new opportunities that exist in fields such as the seafood hub, tourism and trade, to name but a few. We look forward to the holding next year of bilateral talks in Moscow under the Political Consultation Mechanism, and to progress in our negotiations for a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement and a Bilateral Air Services Agreement.

Mauritius also wishes to express its heartiest appreciation for the bilateral assistance it has received from Egypt. It has benefited from the services of a number of medical and technical experts under the Egyptian Fund for Technical Assistance following the recent visits to Mauritius of Her Excellency Mrs. Mona Omar, Egyptian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Her Excellency Ms. Nivin Ashmawi, General Secretary of the Egyptian Fund for Technical Cooperation with Africa.

A new chapter in relations between Mauritius and Singapore has been opened with the visit of the Honourable Prime Minister to Singapore. This highly successful visit has allowed our two countries to identify new avenues for bilateral cooperation and will enable us to benefit from Singaporean technical and financial assistance, especially in the area of sustainable development. We are actively following up on the various issues raised during the visit.

Mauritius and Australia have excellent bilateral relations, characterized by a shared commitment to democracy and a multilateral heritage. The recent visit of the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment to Australia confirms our willingness to further develop the existing economic and trade relations between our two countries. Australia has become a host country for the Mauritius diaspora and an active student community

We acknowledge the bilateral assistance granted to us by Japan specially in the environmental and fisheries sector and believe that under TICAD IV, our prospects for cooperation can be further enhanced.

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

Closer home, we are happy with developments in Comoros where the problem of Anjouan has been settled. As a follow up to the Donors' Conference which Mauritius hosted in December 2005, donors should now honour their pledges so that Comoros can now start its economic development.

Madagascar remains "un grand pays ami", a hinterland with enormous opportunities, known for its abundant resources and agricultural potential. Mauritius believes that Madagascar can become a granary for the region. In the context of

addressing our concerns on food security, Mauritius is proposing, with the support of other operators, to help boost food production in Madagascar and in Mozambique through the establishment of the Food Consortium.

Mauritian investors, who are already well-established in this country, are active in sectors like textile and clothing, banking, and agro-industry as recently borne out by the 2008 edition of the Madagascar-Mauritius Investment Award.

In a true spirit of cooperation, Mauritius and Seychelles successfully conducted negotiations on the limits of their Exclusive Economic Zones and signed an agreement thereon on the basis of equidistance in August this year. This will now enable the two countries to jointly monitor illegal fishing in our respective exclusive economic zones, thereby ensuring economies of scale. Mauritius and Seychelles also initiated this year discussions on a joint submission on the limits of the continental shelf. With the assistance of experts of the Commonwealth, the two countries have been able to prepare and lodge on 1 December 2008 a joint submission to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. The area claimed by the two countries is approximately 387,000 square kilometres and will be managed by a Joint Management Committee. The submission of Mauritius and Seychelles is the 14th one to be made to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf and is the first between two developing countries in the African region.

Mauritius and Seychelles not only share the waters of the Indian Ocean, but have close cultural ties. The Cultural Exchange Programme signed by our two countries has confirmed our endeavour to further develop this common heritage. As small vulnerable economies, Mauritius and Seychelles need to defend together their common interests.

We continue to be concerned with the political situation in Zimbabwe which is now being further complicated by the outbreak of cholera and the accompanying humanitarian costs. We call on all the parties to sit together on the basis of the agreement reached on 15 September 2008 and work out a solution which will be a just, equitable and in the interest of Zimbabwe and Africa. We deplore the decision of Zimbabwe to deny entry to members of the Elders Group.

Mauritius was honoured by the visit of H.E. Mr. Thabo Mbeki, former President of South Africa, who was the chief guest for the celebration of the 40th anniversary of our Independence. We look forward to working closely with President Motlanthe. Our economic relations will be further strengthened with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Economic Cooperation in February next year.

We are thankful to the various UN agencies and in particular the UNDP, as well as to others such as the Agence Française de Développement and the World Bank for their presence in Mauritius and for the support they provide to our development agenda.

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

This year, we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a country fully committed to the promotion and protection of human rights, Mauritius has recently adopted the Equal Opportunities Act. Mauritius has also actively participated in the work of the Human Rights Council. Our membership of the Council has been an enriching experience and we hope to continue serving on this important body. In this regard, we would highly appreciate the support of your respective countries for our candidature for re-election to the Human Rights Council next year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank your respective governments for the re-election of Judge Ariranga Pillay to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the election of Mr. Dheerujlall Seetulsing to the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, the re-election of Judge Rajsoomer Lallah to the Human Rights Committee and the recent election of Mrs. Kamla Devi Varmah to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Alongside strengthening our participation in human rights bodies, we have also been consolidating our relations with UNESCO. The Honourable Prime Minister visited UNESCO last October and signed an Aide Mémoire which aims at strengthening cooperation in several areas between Mauritius and UNESCO. In the context of the “Maurice Ile Durable” project, UNESCO will provide Mauritius with technical and policy advice in specific areas such as renewable energy, education for sustainable development and will facilitate international partnerships, including South-South partnerships.

It is also a matter of pride for us that following the inscription of the Aapravasi Ghat as a World Heritage Site in 2006, Le Morne Mountain was inscribed on the World Heritage List in July this year. We are grateful to the UNESCO Member States for the support extended to us in this regard.

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

It has been a wonderful experience working with you since my appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade. I thank you for your invaluable support and your warm friendship. I look forward to working with you to further consolidate our relations.

I extend to you and members of your family the Season’s greetings and best wishes.

I now invite you to raise your glass in a toast for peace and prosperity to our countries and peoples in 2009.

Thank you.

Port Louis.
22 December 2008.