

Africa Day Message

My Fellow Mauritians,

Today, all over Africa, we are celebrating the 47th Anniversary of the Founding of the Organisation of the African Unity (OAU) now known as the African Union.

25 May 1963 marked the beginning of a new era for Africans in their quest for a strong united Africa based on the ideals of the founding fathers of the OAU.

It is in this spirit that Mauritius took the wise decision, immediately after its independence, to become a member of the Organisation of the African Unity, which on 11 July 2000 became the African Union.

Since its creation, the Organisation has come a long way in promoting the values and principles enshrined in its Constitutive Act, particularly in the field of Peace and Security. The declaration of the Year 2010 by the African Union as the *Year of Peace and Security* bears testimony of the unflinching efforts it is pursuing in that direction.

Mauritius attaches the highest importance to the work being carried out by the African Union. We are committed to lend our full support to assist the Organisation in moving forward its agenda.

In this regard, let me commend on this occasion the Commission of the African Union for carrying out, in such exemplary manner, its responsibility in promoting peace and security on the continent.

The theme for Africa Day this year is "*Building and Maintaining Peace through Sports in Africa*". The choice could not be more appropriate as our continent will be hosting for the first time in history, in a few weeks, the most popular event in the world - the Soccer World Cup.

The organisation of such a prestigious event in South Africa is a source of pride to the whole continent. It is a golden opportunity for all Africans, particularly the African teams, to demonstrate to the world our sense of hospitality, fair play and openness. These are important facets of our African culture.

Promoting friendship out of competition nurtures the spirit of peace and unity, *just like in the olden days a truce was declared between all the nations cities of Greece for the Olympiads.*

An international sporting event of such dimension as the World Cup thus provides an ideal platform for us to reflect on the linkages between peace, security, development and **sports**.

Sports is indeed a powerful medium to bridge cultural, linguistic and other differences. By overcoming these differences, sports helps in enhancing unity, peace and stability, which remain essential components for economic and social development.

The role played by successful African athletes and “*countless unsung heroes*” in projecting a positive image of the African continent on the international scene through sports, is not often given its full value and recognition.

And they are yet all Ambassadors of Peace for Africa.

Inter-cultural exchanges in sports have provided opportunities to numerous African sportsmen to develop and enhance their talents.

Let me here underscore the importance of the IGOAL Campaign Initiative launched in a satellite-linked ceremony led by, *inter-alia*, President Jacob Zuma of South Africa, John Atta Mills, President of Ghana, Hillary Clinton, US Secretary of State, and Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations on 6 October 2009. The objective of this laudable initiative is to mobilize the attention of governments worldwide on the importance of attaining the goal of education for all children around the world - among them no doubt future sporting celebrities.

Such initiatives are powerful tools in providing access and opportunities to overcome poverty and illiteracy, which is one of the root causes of conflicts on the African continent.

We could, therefore, imagine for the future, the possible creation of an International Sports Endowment Fund whose objective would be to assist developing countries in building their capacity in the field of sports.

Mauritius has, over the years, harnessed tremendous goodwill in promoting sports by investing judiciously in the future of our younger generation. The Government has made, in this regard, significant efforts in the creation of appropriate sports infrastructure in many regions, including Rodrigues.

Mauritius has a dedicated Ministry of Youth and Sports whose mandate is to act as a catalyst and facilitator to create an enabling environment for the promotion and development of youth and sports at regional, national and international levels.

The Government specifically encourages the active participation of Mauritian athletes in African competitions and provides them with the necessary resources to

compete at the highest level. With a view to motivating our sportsmen to further excel, Government has also increased substantially the reward for the highest achievers.

The international success of some of our key athletes at the Olympic Game and in other sporting events bears testimony to our national creed for excellence, which goes hand in hand with democratic principles, peace and security.

Africa counts a number of outstanding athletes spanning all disciplines of sports. Our African champions are celebrities in their own right and remain an inspiration for our youth.

On the occasion of the Africa Day, the Government of the Republic of Mauritius would like to reaffirm its commitment to the values of the African Union and its relentless efforts to bring unity, peace and prosperity in Africa.

Port Louis

25 May 2010