

**DRAFT SPEECH BY DR THE HONOURABLE ARVIN BOOLELL, MINISTER OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE VIN D'HONNEUR, SHERATON FOUR POINTS,
EBENE, 20 DECEMBER, 2010**

Secretary for Foreign Affairs,

Your Excellency Mrs Ivanova, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,

Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Missions and Representatives of Regional and International Organisations,

Honorary Consuls General and Honorary Consuls,

Staff Members of my Ministry,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you to this traditional end of year Vin d'Honneur. The Vin d'Honneur provides me with the opportunity to highlight some noteworthy events of this year. The most noteworthy event of the year is the return of this Government to power under the able leadership of Dr the Hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam.

This year we have had the opportunity and privilege to welcome in our midst Her Excellency Mrs Mary Joe Wills, Ambassador of the United States of America, His Excellency Major General (Retired) Muhammad Siddique, High Commissioner of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr Jean-Francois Dobbelle, Ambassador of France, His Excellency Mr Nicolas Leake, High Commissioner of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and about fifteen non-Resident Ambassadors.

Farewell dinners were organised for the following ambassadors namely, H.E Mr Jacques Maillard of France, H.E Dr John Murton of the UK, H.E Mr Bruno Ranarivelo of Madagascar and H.E Mrs. Catherine Johnstone, the High Commissioner of Australia who left Mauritius a few days ago . We also welcome the opening of the People's Bureau of the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr Yousouf Mohamed is now the Honorary Consul for Bangladesh, and I am given to understand that nominations would soon be made for Tanzania and Botswana.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Human Rights - The promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms is high on the agenda of the Government of Mauritius. Mauritius will continue to play an active role in promoting and protecting human rights, including through its participation in the work of the Human Rights Council to which it was elected in 2006 and re-elected in 2009. This year saw the re-election of Ms Pramila Patten to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and recently, the election of Hon. Justice Paul Lam Shang Leen to the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Piracy - With a view to combating the scourge of piracy, Mauritius has taken a number of initiatives both at national and international level to address the issue. Mauritius hosted the Second Regional Ministerial Conference on piracy in October 2010 which adopted a regional strategy. The focus, next year, would be on the implementation of the Regional Strategy and the Plan of Action and the setting up of a Network of Contact Points on Piracy to act as a Coordination Mechanism in the fight of piracy at the regional level.

However, the long lasting solution to the problem of piracy resides in addressing forcefully the Somali problem and restoring peace and security in the region.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bilateral Relations - During the past year Government has initiated a dynamic process of consolidating our bilateral relations with Africa and other countries in the world in line with our objectives to re-engineer our foreign policy.

South Africa - In this context, we are building on our existing ties with South Africa with the implementation of the MOU on Economic Cooperation. A meeting of the Joint Committee will be held in South Africa during the first quarter of next year. We also signed a Bilateral Search and Rescue Agreement between Mauritius and South Africa in November last in order to pool and share resources in search and rescue efforts in the region.

Egypt - Over the years relations between Mauritius and Egypt have been strengthened into strong friendly ties. My Ministry continues to pursue its efforts towards the consolidation of cooperation in sectors including, education, health, culture, information technology, environment, ICT and tourism. As a step further towards strengthening of our bilateral relations, I am proposing to pay an official visit to Egypt next year.

We will extend bilateral relations with other African countries including Tunisia and Uganda.

Comoros - On the regional front, we have always supported the Comoros in its struggle to finding peaceful solutions to its internal political problems. We are following closely the developments in Comoros, in particular the aftermath of the recent elections.

Madagascar is still embroiled in a political crisis since March 2009 despite the ongoing efforts at the regional and international levels to restore constitutional normalcy in the country. It is therefore imperative for all stakeholders to combine efforts in order to give a new thrust to reinvigorate the political process in Madagascar. I am convinced that the SADC, the Indian Ocean Commission, the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie and the African Union will contribute to the elaboration of a roadmap leading to a clear electoral process.

I had in depth discussions recently with both H.E. Mr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the AU Commission, and former President Chissano, with a view to identifying creative solutions into resolving the Malagasy situation.

It is necessary for the international community to engage a mediation process with a view to securing an agreement with the HAT regime on the organisation of neutral and peaceful process of transition leading to elections.

The Government of Mauritius will provide its full support for the setting up of an Independent Electoral Commission and “d’un bureau de la mediation et de l’accompagnement electoral”.

Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs,

France – Les relations bilatérales entre Maurice et la France ont toujours été empreintes de cordialité. De ce fait, je souhaite réitérer la profonde reconnaissance du gouvernement mauricien en faveur de l'appui soutenu de la France au développement économique et socio-culturel de Maurice. A cet égard, nous nous réjouissons de la ré-ouverture du bureau de l'Agence Française de Développement et du précieux soutien de ce dernier au projet Maurice Ile Durable.

L'invitation faite à notre Premier ministre par le Président Sarkozy pour raviver la flamme de l'Arc de Triomphe à Paris témoigne du niveau exceptionnel de nos relations. Je reste persuadé que la prochaine visite de notre Premier ministre à l'île de La Réunion renforcera davantage les relations déjà excellentes entre les deux îles soeurs dans plusieurs domaines de coopération.

Nous sommes également fiers de la mise en application d'une autre pierre angulaire dans l'édifice de nos excellentes relations. Il s'agit, bien évidemment, de *l'Accord relatif au séjour et à la Migration Circulaire de Professionnels entre la République Française et la République de Maurice*.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tromelin - As regards the question of Tromelin, the signing of the Framework Agreement on co-gestion as well as the implementing agreements, by Mauritius and France is indeed an unprecedented landmark given that "co-gestion" has been agreed by both parties. The conclusion of the agreement is not prejudicial to the sovereignty of Mauritius over Tromelin and we shall continue to assert our sovereignty over the island.

Australia - I note with satisfaction that Mauritius and Australia have signed earlier this month a Tax Information Exchange Agreement. I am convinced that my visit to Australia next year will provide an opportunity to intensify our existing ties with Australia. I also avail of this opportunity to reiterate my deepest gratitude to the Government of Australia for the award of the Australian Development Scholarships to developing countries for full time undergraduate or postgraduate studies in Australia. Three of the 11 Mauritians selected to benefit from these awards next year are officials of my Ministry.

UK - The inauguration of a monument commemorating the Bicentenary of British Landing in Mauritius at Bain Boeuf bears testimony of the acknowledgement of the Government of Mauritius of our historical links and of the role of the UK in the development of Mauritius. We were honoured by the visit of Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal, Princess Anne to mark the 1810 Capitulation Treaty. We welcome the recent signature with the UK of a Protocol to amend the Convention for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to taxes on Income and Capital Gains.

Chagos - As far as the sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago is concerned, we are determined to continue to defend our legitimate rights. This has been clearly spelt out by the Hon. Prime Minister in the National Assembly last week.

USA - The traditional friendship between Mauritius and the United States has underpinned the development of our present day dialogue and interaction. Our relations will continue to flourish and grow in the years to come in multiple fields.

TIFA - At the last Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Council Meeting held in Washington, we have agreed to step up bilateral cooperation in the services sector, and to pursue negotiations on the Bilateral Investment Treaty which we are looking forward to conclude by next year. Mauritius is among few countries in Africa negotiating such a treaty with the US which will only add to its credentials as a credible destination for FDI and a business friendly country.

AGOA – We are actively engaged in lobbying efforts in Washington to ensure the extension of AGOA beyond 2015. We have received the support of African Ministers in that endeavour. We are also looking forward to the extension of the third country fabric derogation which will expire in 2012.

Russia - The ties between Mauritius and Russia have been strengthened throughout the years. Cooperation between the two countries has gained considerable momentum since the establishment of a Political Consultation Mechanism. I note with satisfaction that negotiations have successfully been completed on the Agreement in the field of culture and that the agreement will be signed in Moscow in the near future.

India - The visit of H.E Mr. S. M. Krishna, Minister of External Affairs of the Republic of India, in July this year has opened further avenues of cooperation and demonstrated once more the strong will from both our countries to further enhance the relations between Mauritius and India. It allowed us the opportunity to review our bilateral relations and further discuss issues of mutual interest.

The XIX Commonwealth Games in New Delhi in October this year was indeed an exceptional event and a defining moment in Indian history and Mauritius is very proud to have been part of it.

China - Both China and the African continent have been benefiting from the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) since its elaboration at the Beijing Summit in 2006, and which was attended by our Prime Minister. This strategic partnership also ensures that Chinese investors and entrepreneurs avail themselves of the enormous potential in the Continent. The Jinfei project is well underway and we are confident that once completed, it will unleash vast opportunities for both our countries.

China successfully hosted the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai from 1st May to 31st October 2010, with a record number of participants and visitors. A strong Mauritius delegation participated in the event and celebrated its National Pavilion Day on 1st September 2010 in the presence of the President of the Republic. We are proud that Mauritius obtained three awards during that event.

Singapore - The recent visit of Prime Minister to Singapore in September 2010, underscores the desire of Mauritius to further strengthen bilateral relations with Singapore and members of ASEAN. This visit was also an opportunity for the Prime Minister to finalise various strategic partnerships between the two countries.

We are also positioning our country for a more prominent engagement with other Asian and Middle Eastern countries as the region is set to play a dominant geopolitical role in the near future. Our relations with Asia and the Middle East have shown profound development during the course of the year, with strong growth trends on all fronts, particularly in terms of the establishment and deepening of friendly political, economic and social relations.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Pakistan – We reiterate our solidarity to the Pakistani Government and people following the devastation caused by monsoon rains this year. As regards our trade relations, we note with satisfaction that the Preferential Trade Agreement between Mauritius and Pakistan has been completed and is being implemented. We look forward to pursuing discussions on the Free Trade Agreement between our two countries.

Schengen Area - I welcome with great satisfaction the signature of the Short-stay Visa Waiver Agreement and on Mutual Exemption for Holders of Diplomatic and Service Passports between Mauritius and Switzerland in October this year. It will be recalled that Mauritius and the European Community signed a Short-Stay Visa Waiver Agreement in May 2009. We hope to conclude similar Agreements with Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein in the near future.

Continental Shelf – Mauritius has an extensive ocean territory including its territorial waters, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the extended continental shelves Mauritius is claiming under the UNCLOS, the total area of our claim being 703, 000 sq Km. In the years ahead, we shall continue to ensure that Mauritius is ideally positioned to exert its sovereignty over its territorial waters and entitled under International Law to tap the vast resources of the ocean to the fullest.

WTO Negotiations - It has been nine years now since the Doha Development Agenda was launched. We are hopeful that the outcome of the G20 meeting in Seoul held in November last, a strong political commitment has been made to complete the round in 2011 and in this regard negotiators in Geneva have been instructed accordingly.

We should stand ready to engage constructively with all parties to move the negotiations forward with a view to concluding them in 2011. Concluding the Round is very important as it would address the imbalances and distortions in the trading system and generate a more level playing field

EPA - The signing of the Interim EPA was crucial, to safeguard our preferential access on the European market. More specifically for Mauritius, the Interim EPA does preserve and consolidate access on the EU market which happens to absorb some 70% of our exports. The interim EPA is not an end in itself. We are pursuing

negotiations to conclude a full and comprehensive EPA which will involve key areas of interest for Mauritius including services, Investment and trade facilitation.

ACP-EU Relations

Signature of the Second Revision of the Cotonou Agreement

On 22 June, 2010, on behalf of Mauritius, I signed the Second Revised Cotonou Agreement. It is our hope that the EU Member States would give the Commission of the European Union, the necessary mandate to start discussions on the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MAFF) for its early entry into force in 2013.

Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy (MAAS) for the Sugar Sector

Following the reduction of the guaranteed price for our sugar exports by 36%, Mauritius between 2006 and 2010 had registered a net loss in export earnings of Euro 645 Million. Despite the various socio-economic challenges it had to grapple with since 2005, the Government of Mauritius embarked on a bold reform programme of its sugar sector. We are now in a crucial phase. The continued assistance from the EU would be a determining factor in our efforts to achieve economic growth and social progress.

For the period 2007-2010, under the *First Tranche*, the EU allocated Euros 139.6 million to Mauritius. An additional sum of Euros 139.6 million has been allocated for the period 2011-2013 under the *Second Tranche*. The successful implementation of the reforms for the period 2007-2010 is the result of a combination of political commitment on the part of Government but above all the all-inclusive nature of consultations while preparing the Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy (MAAS).

Emerging Economies - Government is keen to diversify our market base, we are exploring opportunities in emerging markets such as India, Pakistan, Turkey, Brazil, China. With Pakistan we have already concluded a PTA. Negotiations for a FTA is ongoing with Turkey while we have made requests for FTA Negotiations with China, Russia, Brazil as well as with countries of the European Free Trade Area. Proposal

for FTA has also been made to Malaysia, Singapore and ECOWAS in Western Africa. We hope to receive positive responses and to embark in negotiations.

EFTA - We are also committed to forge closer economic and trade ties with the countries of the European Free Trade Area (Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein), the aim being to create trade opportunities for Mauritius across the whole of Western Europe on the same basis as the EPA with the EU. Mauritius has already signed a joint Declaration on cooperation with the EFTA states on 09 June 2009 as a first step towards the conclusion of a Free Trade Agreement. The Joint Declaration is aimed at enhancing economic relations between Mauritius and the EFTA states, facilitating the increased involvement of the private sector, in particular SMEs in trade and commercial cooperation and examining the possibility of further developing trade and economic cooperation.

Intellectual Property Rights - In view of the prominent role that Intellectual Property (IP) plays on the economic and cultural development of Mauritius, it is imperative that we reinforce our Intellectual Property policy so as to promote innovation and creativity. In this regard, my Ministry has sought assistance from WIPO to develop an Intellectual Development Property Development Plan (IPDP) in order to update and strengthen and modernize our IPR infrastructure and capacity.

IOC - As chair of the Indian Ocean Commission, Mauritius will spare no efforts in ensuring the implementation of projects which are in the pipeline, namely the creation of an economic and commercial space, the promotion of a regional strategy on fisheries and aquaculture financed by the 10th EDF. It is rejoicing to note that Mauritius has been selected to host the COMESA Infrastructure Fund which is intended to mobilize resources for construction and maintenance of infrastructure.

Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Trade - Aware of the complexity of a number of emerging issues that the diplomatic service is called upon to address, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been pursuing its training programme with the holding of workshops on topical issues. Some two hundred officials from the Ministry as well as the public service and private sector have benefited from these courses. With additional financial resources, the Institute will strengthen in 2011 its training

programme focusing on trade and economic matters, in-depth discussions on political and regional issues, self development, and acquisition of skills.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Toast

May I take this opportunity to convey to you and to members of your family my heartiest greetings for a prosperous New Year 2011.

I now invite you to join me in raising your glass for a toast: to the continued excellent relationship between Mauritius and the countries that you represent.

Thank you.