

***Deputy Prime Minister's Speech for the Opening Ceremony
of IFNGO Conference to be held at Grand Bay International
Conference Centre on Sunday 21 August 2005 at 1700 hrs***

Hon. Ministers

***The President of the International Federation
of Non-Governmental Organizations***

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am greatly honoured to address you on the occasion of the opening of the 21st International Federation of Non-Governmental Organisations (IFNGO) International Conference.

We welcome very heartily in our midst the President of the International Federation of NGOs as well as other NGO leaders who have travelled from different parts of the world to join us in our common struggle against substance abuse.

I understand that this is a historic conference as it is the first time that the NGOs affiliated to IFNGO are meeting in Africa to address the problems of substance abuse and its related plights like HIV/AIDS, family violence. The Government of Mauritius is grateful to IFNGO for choosing Mauritius as venue for this important gathering. I am pleased to congratulate the IFNGO leaders and NATReESA for the laudable initiative to mobilize so many NGOs in order to share knowledge and experience in the fight against substance abuse.

I hope that the objectives which have been set by the IFNGO for this conference will be successfully met. I have had a look at your work programme and I am much impressed by the wise selection of themes for discussion and the high-level standing of the speakers in each session. I can already assure you of the full support of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius in your determination and commitment to deal effectively with the scourge of substance abuse.

I should like to place on record that, in general, NGOs in Mauritius have been doing good work in various sectors, eg, education, health, consumer protection or drug abuse.

At present, we have ten government subsidized NGOs engaged in the drug/alcohol rehabilitation activities. Nine of these NGOs which emanate from socio-cultural organizations have provided land, building and infrastructural facilities to Government for the setting up of Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres. The remaining one, the Dr Idrice Goomany Centre was offered a building by the Government through NATReSA on a portion of land leased by the Municipality of Port Louis. The Government of Mauritius, through NATReSA, is funding the running cost of the ten Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres. The Centres not only offer treatment and rehabilitation facilities, but are involved in prevention campaigns, thus educating the people to adopt a lifestyle free from substance abuse.

To ensure a better control over drugs, Mauritius took the decision to become a party to a SADC protocol on Regional Drug Control.

At the local level, we are regularly collecting data from the ten NGOs and governmental organisations like the Police and the Customs departments and reporting on a bi-annual basis through the Mauritius Epidemiological Network on Drug Use.

Last year, we conducted a national survey in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in the context of a Rapid Situation Assessment in the country. The NGOs have been of immense help and have given their support for the collection of data concerning drug use, HIV/AIDS and sex workers.

The Rapid Situation Assessment has helped us to come forward with a National Drug Control Master Plan year 2004-2009 whereby we are in a position to address the national problem on drug use in a systematic way. According to the Master Plan, we are providing substitution therapy to drug addicts at the treatment centres run by NGOs.

We are also providing detoxification services to drug addicts in a medical environment at the Brown Sequard Mental Health Care Centre. Being given that the population of drug addicts in Mauritius ranges from 17,000 to 20,000 and conscious that 95% of them are heroin users, we have doubled our efforts to sensitize the drug addicts against HIV/AIDS proliferation and Hepatitis B and C through the sharing of syringes among drug users. On their part the NGOs are carrying out blood screening at their centres for the detection of these diseases.

Within the prisons too, the problem of proliferation of HIV/AIDS among detainees taking drugs is a major concern. Steps have been taken to strengthen existing facilities like the Lotus Centre which is a residential

Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre within the prisons, and which caters for detainees six months before their release so that they may contact the existing ten Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres once they are free.

The Mauritian Government is sparing no efforts to mobilize community resources to prevent substance abuse. But we have to remain very vigilant in view of the increasing volume of illicit global drug trade.

The World Drug Report 2005 recently released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime describes the negative impacts of the illicit drug trade in every society in the world. The Report estimates that some 200 million people or 5% of the global population aged 15 to 64 have consumed illicit drugs at least once in the last twelve months. The drug trade is pernicious and large. It touches almost every level of human security from individual health to safety and social welfare. One of the findings of the Report is that the consequences of the illicit drug trade are devastating particularly for countries with limited resources to fight against it.

I hope that the deliberations of the conference will be beneficial to one and all. Your ideas will better equip us in our capacity to fight the drug abuse scourge.

I also wish to take this opportunity to wish all the foreign participants a pleasant stay in Mauritius. I hope that this 21st IFNGO Conference will meet with a big success in terms of achievements and that everybody will come out, enriched with a wealth of information and knowledge, experiences and skills, and what is more, with greater mutual understanding for future collaborations.

I have much pleasure in declaring open the 21st IFNGO Conference.

Thank you.