



Republic of **Mauritius**

**OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY
OF THE
AFRICAN PRESIDENTIAL ROUNDTABLE 2011**

**MARITIM HOTEL
BALACLAVA**

WEDNESDAY 01 JUNE 2011

10 00 HOURS

SPEECH

BY

**DR THE HON NAVINCHANDRA RAMGOOLAM, GCSK, FRCP
PRIME MINISTER**

Deputy Prime Minister,
Hon Chief Justice,
Colleague Ministers,
Former Heads of State and Government,
Director of the African Presidential Archives and Research Centre,
Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Delegates,

It is an honour for Mauritius to host the African Presidential Roundtable 2011.

I thank the Director of the African Presidential Archives and Research Centre, Ambassador Stith of the University of Boston. When I first met him, I knew he was a man of big ideas - as Mr Troy Fitrell said - and I must thank him for bringing together such a distinguished panel of respected former Heads of State and Government, ministers, eminent scientists, prominent writers and well known opinion leaders together, in Mauritius, to discuss the challenge of Energy for All in Africa, pending the International Year of Sustainable Energy, next year.

This meeting is taking place against the backdrop of a series of events, which have increased the risks to our energy security, namely the political unrest in certain parts of the world, the economic downturns that have affected the global economy, price volatility of oil and fossil fuels and other commodities.

This situation has been exacerbated by the recent calamity in Japan and the decision two days ago by Germany to phase out nuclear power.

It is important, in my view, that your discussions be placed in the broader perspective of sustainable growth and development in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Distinguished Guests,

The long history of human development bears testimony to the power of human ingenuity in overcoming obstacles and improving living standards. Human ingenuity will however be much tested in the 21st century as energy prices rise and the reliance on sustainable

resources takes a new urgency. The 21st century energy agenda for Africa will provide both real challenges but also enormous opportunities.

Many of the challenges Africa faces are shared by other countries. As world economic prosperity spreads beyond a small group of countries in Western Europe and North America the price of energy has been rising sharply. Ensuring long term access to energy at reasonable prices will be important if we want to maintain our competitiveness.

Along with rising energy demands we can also expect changing demands. As Government regulation increasingly responds to the issue of sustainability and the environment we will see a growing focus on sustainable energy sources. Whilst some African countries are oil exporters the shift towards sustainable energy offers real potential amongst a wider set of African economies which can potentially draw on solar energy and bio fuels.

In Mauritius new life has been given to old sectors such as sugar with the growing importance of energy from biomass. The twenty first century challenge of securing access to reasonably priced environmentally friendly sustainable energy is therefore a critical one for all of Africa. My own country, Mauritius is typical of the challenge we face. We have successfully for many decades developed our economy and our future relies on our skills and flexibility as a nation. Investment and education are what will drive our economy forward just as they have done in the past. But investment in new forms of energy and education amongst firms and consumers as to how best to utilise energy in a sustainable way will be crucial.

Being a small vulnerable island, Mauritius is particularly concerned with the irreversible impact of climate change on its natural resources.

When Mauritius achieved independence in 1968, it used to depend to the tune of 60% on renewable energies – by-products of the sugar cane industry and hydro-power being the main sources. With economic development and population growth, these same sources of renewable energies represent, today, only 20% of the total electricity mix. We are targeting 35% autonomy by 2025 through increased use of green energy.

The Maurice-Ile-Durable (MID) Project was launched by me as a response to the Millennium Development Goals and to the challenges of climate change.

MID is essentially a vision that seeks to transform the environmental, economic and social landscape of Mauritius. It is about sustainable development and inclusive growth.

The Maurice-Ile-Durable vision is embedded in a strategic framework embracing five development pillars, including energy.

In 2008, my Government earmarked Rs 1.3 billion for the MID Fund which has focused on renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes. It is funding wind farms and hydropower stations.

The MID Fund has funded additional projects, such as the provision of grants for the purchase of solar water heaters, the sale – at subsidized prices – of low energy consumption lamps for households, the replacement of traditional traffic lights and street lightings by energy efficient ones.

In 2008, there were 25,000 households equipped with a solar water heater. With the Maurice Ile Durable Fund, the number has almost doubled.

We have established institutional mechanisms to better address climate change and disaster related issues. We are creating awareness for sustainable development and promoting sustainable lifestyles, right from garbage disposal to more responsible behaviour towards nature, through the greening of the building codes, green procurement in the public sector and sustainable production and consumption.

In the spirit of democratization of the energy sector, we have put up a scheme that will allow households and businesses to produce their own electricity through renewable sources. They will produce for their own consumption and will have the opportunity to sell up to 70% of their production to the Central Electricity Board. This project has attracted significant interest from individual households as well as from commercial entities.

The same spirit of democratization is also reaching the shores of the cane industry which has been undergoing structural changes during the past years. Small planters will be able to make an optimal use of their by-products and sell the electricity they produce.

In addition to the existing biomass and the hydropower plants, a landfill gas to energy plant will be operational later this year; and two wind farms will be feeding electricity to the national grid by next year.

Private promoters have been invited to express their interest to invest in solar technology to produce electricity.

Studies aimed at exploring the geothermal potential in the island will be carried out this year. My Office has spearheaded a study on the introduction of ethanol, produced locally, to the tune of 10% for powering our cars.

While investment in renewable energy is a medium and long term objective, energy efficiency can help us to reduce and control demand within the short term and yield immediate results. An Energy Efficiency Act has been enacted last March with the aim of developing standards and enforcing energy audits. We propose the setting up of an Energy Efficiency Management Office to formulate and implement energy efficiency strategies and recommend innovative financing.

Access to affordable energy is a critical factor in our endeavour to achieve economic growth and reduce poverty. The African continent and Small Island Developing States are facing critical challenges.

According to UNIDO, some Sub-Saharan countries have electrification rates of less than one per cent, while energy intensity per capita is extremely low - at almost less than half of the world's average. It is unfortunate that the numerous resources of the continent remain unexploited and underutilized.

Africa's vast biomass resources, if managed judiciously, can ensure both food security and energy security, so essential for sustainable development.

Africa's lack of basic infrastructure continues to hamper its competitiveness and economic growth.

According to the International Energy Agency, some US \$ 36 billion are necessary, each year, to provide universal access to modern energy by 2030. Unfortunately, less than 1% of total world investment, in clean technologies, goes to Africa while the continent has the greatest potential in renewable energy !

To achieve the targets of the Millennium Development Goals, it is essential to make energy accessible to all and to promote technology transfer. We need to focus our attention on strengthening the renewable energy industry and markets in Africa.

As the co-chair of the Africa-Europe Energy Partnership under the aegis of the African Union, Mauritius has been playing an active role to develop a regional energy strategy for Africa. A road map has been developed with a focus on realistic and visible targets to be attained by 2020.

The development of a sustainable economy depends on our capacity to identify and tap appropriate technologies. The importance of developing regional priorities, establishing strategic partnerships and attracting capital investments has to be constantly emphasized.

I hope that the distinguished participants in this Roundtable will have a better understanding of the complexity of the energy industry and contribute to the formulation of policies aimed at mitigating risks and preparing Africa to overcome the challenges ahead.

Our agenda is an ambitious one but it is attainable with the commitment of all member states and the support of our development partners.

But we also have to bear in mind that most of what needs to be done, needs to be done in Africa, by Africans. I am confident that we can cooperate to gather the energies and talents that will bring a new light to the future of the continent.

I wish all the participants very fruitful discussions and hope we manage to work towards the *"global clean energy revolution"* wished by the United Nations Secretary General.

Distinguished Guests,

The world is reshaping itself and the twenty first century holds rich opportunities for Africa. I look forward to receiving the insights of your discussions.

I now have the honour to declare the African Presidential Roundtable 2011 open.

I thank you for your attention.

**Dr the Hon Navinchandra Ramgoolam, GCSK, FRCP
Prime Minister
Republic of Mauritius**