

**Honorable Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs, External
Communication and National Development Unit, Minister of Finance
and Economic Development, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth**

My colleague Ministers

**Dr Dirk Glaesser, Director of Sustainable Development of Tourism
Programme of UNWTO,**

Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Heads of Delegations,

Mrs Seewooruttun, Permanent Secretary of my Ministry

Captains of the Tourism Industry,

Distinguished Delegates,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning to you all,

It is my great privilege and honor to warmly welcome you to the first International Conference we are holding in Mauritius on the theme: Digitalization and Sustainable Tourism. I am particularly grateful to the Hon Prime Minister, Hon Pravin K Jugnauth, who , despite his busy schedule, has

graciously accepted to be present and to deliver a keynote address at the opening ceremony.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The year 2018 marks the 50th anniversary of our independence. At the time of independence in 1968, several illustrious economists from world famous institutions had written off Mauritius as a viable state. It is with great pride that we can affirm today that those prophets of doom were wrong. From a State without any hope and prospects, Mauritius is at present a model of democracy, an inclusive development strategy with a vibrant economy. Mauritius is a beacon of tolerance and a haven of peace and security.

In view of the importance of the tourism industry in the economy, we considered that this moment is opportune to take stock of what has been achieved and of what is achievable, to share experiences and best practices with you, distinguished delegates. We have experts and specialists who will share with us their knowledge on how to make the tourism industry digitalized and sustainable. We are at the cross-roads and we must know which turn to take.

Tourism in Mauritius relies on security of the destination, high quality resorts, a multi-ethnic population, a confluence of religions, cultures and traditions- in fact a mosaic of the world. Tourism is always a work in progress and this is why we are here to learn and to strategize.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The choice of the theme is deliberate as we all know that travel and tourism of tomorrow will be determined by the impact of Digitalization on Sustainable Tourism. Travelling into the future conjures up an image of Mauritius as a Digital Paradise. We intend to seize the potential of new technology to advance the tourism industry. With social media and new products like crypto-currency and blockchain, technology can hold a lot of promise but it can also be disruptive. What is certain is that technology will shape the world of the future. How we respond to the new paradigm will determine the fate of the industry. **Sustainable digitalization and digitalized sustainability - that is the question.**

As Travel is about connecting people and places, there is always a great story to tell afterwards. Travel opens the mind, fosters mutual understanding

and, as a contributor to world peace, tourism is people to people diplomacy at its best.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world of travel has undergone rapid transformations over the years. Whereas Europe and North America have for decades dominated the travel and tourism industry, this is likely to change in the near future. With China and India on the rise , the potential for growth from Asia, the Middle East and Africa is mind-boggling. The One Belt One Road project initiated by China will be a game changer for the travel and tourism industry. This may turn one day into One Belt One Road One Destination. New places of interest and as yet unknown frontiers will be accessible and the urge to keep pushing further the man-made boundaries will be unstoppable. This titanic project is pregnant with unforeseen potential and unimaginable prospects for tourism as people move across national boundaries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Air access and connectivity, the lure of adventure, the need to know about different places and cultures coupled with people around the world having

more disposable wealth, are driving the pace of the travel and tourism industry. Conventional and traditional tourism is paving the way for a more individualized, customized, adventure-seeking and once-in-a-lifetime experience tourism. We are on the brink of a mega explosion of this category of tourism and we must prepare ourselves to meet that demand. As modern society keeps abreast with digitalization in all spheres of life, the tourism industry cannot be left behind and it should not leave anyone behind. This Conference will build on the achievements of Samoa 2014.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There were times when people spoke about intelligence and intelligent people. There were IQs and other tests for intelligence. We have moved into the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and no one knows where AI can lead to or what it can generate both in terms of positive or destructive forces. While tourism can be and is a force for good, can we be that optimistic about tourism and AI? Are there serious risks to privacy of the individuals or can a hacker wreak havoc with the data collected?

On 25 May 2018 the General Data Protection Regulation comes into effect in the EU. The GDPR affects every company that holds or processes

personal data or consumer data. Although the GDPR applies to the EU it would be advisable for all operators to take it on board as privacy issues will become increasingly relevant. There are ethical issues about the collection of personalized data which we cannot afford to overlook. Recent events have highlighted the dilemma of Facebook which allegedly engaged in illicit harvesting of personal data. While Mauritius intends to grow into a Digital Paradise, we want to do it with having total respect and regard for the privacy of the individual.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over and above digitalization in the tourism industry, we are conscious of the significance of mobile to mobile publicity. The individual becomes the focus of the strategy for destination promotion. People love to share their experiences on social media and the web and the geometric progression of such visibility is infinite. Fortunately, we will be helped in this exercise by digitalization which has the ability to harvest and to harness data. The expectations of the millennials generally and tourists in particular are geared towards unique and authentic experiences. They all want to be and feel special. The way to address this depends on how personal data is captured from customers in order to learn about their life preferences and

expectations. Anticipating their needs and catering to them will unlock the potential of digitalization and ensure the future continued success in tourism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The tourism industry has been at the forefront of the digital impact which is shaping irrepressibly the way tourism business is done. Modern technology has through high speed internet connectivity and other communication technologies like geolocation, mobile payments and social platforms transformed the tourism industry. One cannot envisage modern tourism without these technological assets.

According to the World Economic Forum's Digital Transformation Initiative (DTI), from 2016 to 2025, digitalization in aviation, travel and tourism is expected to create up to US\$ 305 billion of value for the industry through increased profitability, migrate US\$ 100 billion of value from traditional players to new competitors, and generate benefits valued at US\$ 700 billion for customers and society at large. C-Trip- a Chinese OTA (Online Travel Agent) - has a platform where more sales are made through mobile devices rather than computers. This is the reality we must deal with.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Internet has placed personalization within the reach of every individual. Modern technology allows a DMO (Destination Marketing Organization) to engage a customer at all stages of the experience, from browsing, awareness, retention of interest until the booking stage. Once the experience is over, the DMO can still engage for feedback. The collection and monitoring of data from customers is a precious addition to making a destination sustainably desirable. Responsiveness, innovation and responsibility are the keys for sustainable digital tourism.

Whatever value addition digitalization can bring, conventional tourism must never lose its glitter and glamour. Ancestral values, traditions, cultures, archaeological sites , preservation and protection of the environment are the inevitable ingredients of sustainable and inclusive tourism. Tourism must be the industry that makes a partnership with everyone from the local community to the ultimate shareholder. It is a joint venture built on an understanding that the benefits are equitably shared. The Sustainable Development Goals are central to our tourism development as our aim is to ensure tourism is owned by everyone and benefits the whole community in an inclusive manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Distinguished delegates,

I am positive that this International Conference will chart new avenues for us to embrace digitalization as an asset for tourism development. We cannot afford to ignore social media and the power of the Internet which , as a virtual platform , is a limitless market place.

Digitalization can be both a friend and a tyrant. We will learn a lot about that during this Conference. Let us also not forget that the human touch in tourism is priceless and irreplaceable. No amount of technology can substitute a smile on a lovely face.

The best way, ladies and gentlemen, to win the hearts of people is through human contact and tourism without the intervention of ordinary women and men is unsustainable. This is the pathway for sustainable, inclusive, responsible, responsive and resilient tourism.

I trust that you will have an enjoyable stay in our midst and , should there be anything that we might have missed for your comfort, do let us know and we shall have the needful done.

I wish you all fruitful deliberations and do enjoy this dream destination which Mauritius is.

Thank you for your kind attention.