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Distinguished members of the world of academia,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning

I wish to express my sincere thanks to BEST EN THINK TANK XV11 and the International Centre for sustainable Tourism of University of Mauritius for inviting me to deliver a speech on this very important occasion. The theme of this gathering, or conversation, which is “Innovation and Progress in Sustainable Tourism” is extremely important for all stakeholders of the tourism industry.

As you are all aware, the year 2017 has been declared by the United Nations as the year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Tourism has become one of the world’s fastest growing industries and its potential for employment, foreign exchange and wealth creation is huge. The tourism industry is a people’s oriented and centered one and this is one additional reason why all countries are concentrating their efforts on how they can derive maximum benefits from the industry. There is a

sense of optimism that pervades the industry worldwide, despite all the attack and other things that are happening to frighten people from travelling.

I am sure that we all need to understand that conventional tourism as an industry distinct from sustainable tourism developed at a time when the world was not tuned to or conscious about the threats to the environment by unplanned and poorly managed tourism development. The situation today is different and we are delighted that this is so. The environment and nature that we enjoy today is on trust to us and, as trustees, we have an obligation to the generations that are yet to be born that we bequeath to them what was bequeathed to us.

At present it is appropriate and good to acknowledge that all persons engaged in tourism development are committed to planning all new projects along the lines of sustainable tourism.

The tourism and travel industry accounts for just over 10 % of the Mauritian GDP. It generates a wide range of employment and it holds promise for even more in the future. While Mauritius is very keen in promoting its tourism industry and to do it in conformity with the principles of good environmental, ethical, moral and political governance, it realizes that, for the industry to be sustainable, it must be responsive to what the modern traveler wants. Mauritius is known as an upmarket tourism destination and we are very anxious in keeping it that way. While we agree to give the tourist a great time, we also endeavor not to do so at the detriment of the tenets of sustainable tourism.

We ensure that no activity that can impact negatively or adversely on the industry is undertaken whether on land or in the lagoons or at sea. We would rather turn down an activity that can bring even more tourists if that activity is harmful.

This is why we have a process of public consultation before we embark on any major project as we are conscious of the necessity of bringing everyone on board on all tourism developments. We also have very good laws regarding the environment and no tourist enterprise can be started without a full environmental impact assessment. And any person who feels aggrieved by any decision of the authorities to proceed with a development can challenge it before the courts.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Tourism is, it will and it can remain a clean industry with the active involvement and participation of local communities. We are convinced that local communities which know their region can meaningfully contribute in the shaping of sustainable tourism activities. These communities know more than anyone about what is sustainable for the environment and society. While we must strive to leave no one behind, we cannot overlook the fact that a balance needs to be struck between the

protection and preservation of the environment and development. As far as possible we do ensure that all concerns are addressed as we do not want to take any risks which can be harmful or which can wreck the industry.

During the 70th session of the UN General assembly 154 heads of state or government adopted a far-reaching and ambitious 2030 agenda for sustainable Development, along with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs carry on the work of the Millennium Development Goals which were adopted in the year 2000 by the UNGA. The SDGs aim at, inter alia, ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all. Tourism has the potential to contribute significantly to realization of all the goals which are interconnected, in particular, on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Goal 8 of the SDGs aims at promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Since tourism is one of the driving forces of global economic growth and currently accounts for 1 in 11 jobs worldwide, it is evident that all opportunities must be seized. These opportunities for employment will be for the young people and women who may never have been in formal employment and who may have no skills. The tourism industry sets the stage for training and the upgrading of those with basic skills. Because tourism is multi-sectorial and creates jobs in a multitude of areas like Transport, entertainment, landscaping, leisure activities, food and beverages, local traditions, culture and art, handicraft, tourism guides, ecotourism, sports, hunting, big game fishing, excursions, gastronomy, literature and the list is endless.

Target 8.9 states: 'By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products'.

I am happy to say that Mauritius is well on its way to achieving this specific target.

Unlike countries with large populations Mauritius cannot boast of any domestic tourism. We rely primarily on foreign tourists who unfortunately add to the carbon footprint as air travel adds to global warming.

Since we are far from the major population countries, we have promoted the tourism industry in Mauritius as an exclusive dream destination. We have never considered mass tourism as an alternative. We believe in a tourism product that is appealing to any tourist from any part of the world. We invest heavily in the quality of accommodation and we have a star rating which applies to all tourist establishments. We strive to keep our country safe and clean. We invest huge amounts on public health as we want Mauritius to be a disease-free and welcoming place for everyone. We have no epidemics and we

have an excellent system of tracking passengers who arrive from risk countries. We wish to send a signal to everyone that there are no health risks for people to travel to Mauritius. And I am sure, those who arrived here by air must have been given a yellow form from the health authorities which you are required to fill. These forms are very useful because they help to track any person who may pose a health risk. The health teams are effective and this is why Mauritius has been malaria-free for decades. The tourist who comes here feels at home because our hospitality personnel speak a wide variety of languages.

There is no one size that fits all forms of tourist, whether it is conventional or sustainable. But I am sure, in any event sustainable tourism must work around these issues:

What is available?

What is being done?

What can be done?

What can be done better?

What is required to be done?

What is desired?

What is desirable?

What is affordable?

What is ethical?

What is realistically achievable?

What of what is achievable is sustainable?

These questions ladies and gentlemen, are only indicative as sustainable tourism involves very wide interests which keep evolving. Let us not forget that tourism is at all times a work in progress.

In view of the fact that all countries which have a tourist industry wish to project an image of uniqueness and authenticity, they may, on account of a fierce competitive environment, be tempted to cut corners. Such temptation must

be resisted. It is easier said than done but it is imperative for sustainability to prevail.

I wish to address another issues ladies and gentlemen, and this is the management of expectations of the public.

How does one manage expectations of people? It is clear that an industry like tourism must deal with competing demands and challenges. People tend to focus on their specific interest and the larger picture simply falls off their radar. While this is a very human attitude, decision makers must keep in mind that it is the overarching public interest that ultimately matters and counts.

In order to keep under constant review the way the tourism industry is faring and in order to guarantee that the industry remains sustainable, we consider that a tourist research unit is necessary.

Tastes change and a rapid response strategy to satisfy the new demands will ensure that the industry remains relevant and sustainable.

It is also important to create awareness among the tourists that whatever they come to enjoy must also be available for future generations. Responsible travel for the environment, respecting local tradition and culture and engaging with the local communities, ensuring that part of the benefits of tourism go towards improving the quality of life of all those who are directly or indirectly impacted by tourism are matters that a research unit can work on.

If we devote full attention to what makes tourism sustainable, the way forward for tourism will be very clear. A road map for what is sustainable and what needs to be sustainable will indeed be progress.

Let us express the hope that the tourist industry will remain an industry that will stand the test of time and that will keep responding to the needs of modern times. Success depends on maintaining sustainability.

I am convinced that the best years for tourism are yet to come. Tourism gets people who know nothing about each other to meet and this is people to people diplomacy at its best. Sustainable tourism leads to peace, understanding, friendship.

Tourism brings down walls and we must do whatever we can at all levels to provide opportunities for travel to all people from all parts of the world. Walls must be demolished as they block understanding among people.

In conclusion I will look forward to the outcome of your work.

I thank you for your attention.

