

H.E Mrs Marjaana Sall, Ambassador of the EU Delegation to the Republic of Mauritius

Mrs Seewooruthun, PS of the Ministry of Tourism

Mr Jaynarain Meetoo, Chairman of MGI

Mrs Boodoo, Director of the Tourism Authority

Mr Rochecoute Chairman of the Tourism Authority

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning,

Last Friday Cabinet approved the Strategic Plan for the Tourism industry. One of the elements of that Plan is to professionalize the course on Tourism Guides. So far this activity did not enjoy such a status.

This day is the beginning of a great new adventure in tourism guiding. For too long this fundamental aspect of tourism has

been neglected. The time has come now to elevate tourism guiding into a professional activity. I wish at this stage to thank the EU which has been a really consistent and long partner for Mauritius over the years for the funding of the Switch Africa Project which will be accompanying this course and whose mandate is to promote sustainable tourism in Mauritius and, inter alia, by demonstrating and scaling up tools to assess impacts along the value chain, and improving awareness and marketing of sustainable tourism projects. I must also thank the MGI for co organizing this course with the Tourism Authority.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The tourism industry is growing very fast but it must respond to the traditional and not so traditional demands that are being made on it. While Mauritius is enjoying the reputation of a high end luxury destination with pristine beaches, white sand and world class resorts, we consider that we must offer to the tourists opportunities to leave their resorts and to travel across

the island to see and marvel at the hundreds of sites which are of great historical, environmental, religious and cultural significance. Mauritians are known for their friendliness and their hospitality. We want the tourists to get to know Mauritius how we live and how we love sharing our life experiences with peoples of the world.

One of the main concerns that we have in the Tourism industry is the lack of opportunities for tourists to spend their money. Very often I hear that the tourists take away all the Euros that they should have spent in Mauritius. I am of the view that the duty free island concept which was launch more than ten years ago with world class shopping malls and getting tourists to move from their luxury hotels to participate in events, festivals and activities could provide tourists with those opportunities. It is my aim and my ambition to open up Mauritius to the tourists as the product that we have is something that we can all be proud of. Our cultural, religious and ethnic diversity coupled with a spirit of tolerance in the population are part of our heritage that we

can showcase to the world. Mauritius is like the United Nations in miniature.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the first time that we will be having a well-structured and content-full course on Tour Guiding. Tour Guides have been performing their tasks without any proper formal training. As we professionalize the tourism industry we have no other alternative that to train our Tourism Guides in all areas which are relevant to the industry at large. In some countries, no one can become a Tourist Guide without having obtain a University degree before offering his/her services. This is why I am delighted to have played a role in getting this course on course. I am happy to take cognizance of the Objectives of the Course:

-To equip students with knowledge of the history, environment, culture and heritage of Mauritius.

- To impart the basic understanding of the national institutions and their roles.
- To enable learners to develop skills in collecting and communicating sound information to tourists
- To raise awareness about environmental issues and develop student's commitment to inclusive and sustainable tourism
- To train students as ethical, well groomed, eloquent and committed ambassadors of Mauritian culture.

It is also my wish ladies and gentlemen, that at the end of the course the guides will be able to advise tourists about monuments, museums, places to visit and to give a running commentary on the history of the places, things to do, places to eat, attractions, entertainment and theatrical event, religious festivals and also going to those places where tourists do not normally go, the offbeat destination.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mauritius prides itself as being a melting cauldron of diverse cultures, religions, traditions and languages. The tourist guide will be an expert in everything that will make the experience of the tourist memorable and enjoyable. I also believe that tourists guide must be trained in the cultures, religions, traditions and practices of the countries from which the majority of our tourists come. Being exposed to such experiences will prepare the tourist guide to interact more effectively with the tourist. As an example, it is in order for a tourist guide to shake hand with a European female tourist but this would be totally out of order with a lady tourist coming from the Arab world. I hope that the course will be adapted in order to meet the challenges of the emerging tourism market. This is even more important when advising or suggesting places to eat to the tourists. The tourist guide will become the best interface between a tourist and Mauritius. I have been to places where tourist guides are like celebrities as they can display a range of knowledge and a depth of feeling for the places that they talk about. I am sure that

among those who will be starting the course, some will emerge as stars for the tourism industry.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the beginning of a road which will be endless as tourism is a renewable industry which will contribute to the wealth and wellbeing of the nation for years to come. The tourist guide will have the responsibility to create the awareness that is required to get the tourists to develop a sense of belonging to Mauritius and to provide an insider access to what Mauritius is all about.

Let us not forget that lots of information is available in books, magazines and online about all places in Mauritius. But the tourist guide has a role to play. Because he will make places come alive and transform a tourist site into a piece of theatre with stories, anecdotes and personal testimony. Working as a Tourist guide is wonderful as no two days resemble each other.

Meeting people from all parts of the world, answering their questions and sharing knowledge and learning from them also is a pleasurable activity. Tourists will come from all part of the world to Mauritius, they will go back but what we want is when they go back a part of Mauritius will stay with them forever. And this will be on account of what thy will have learned from the Tourist Guides.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mauritius is home to numerous tourism sites which are being degraded for lack of maintenance and repair. I hope that this process will generate interest in protecting and preserving all tourist sites both on mainland Mauritius but also in the outer islands. You may know that Flat island has a lot of history which we must teach in our schools. The same is true of all the islets around Mahebourg. The Tourist Guides must become knowledgeable about many things about Mauritius and, as time goes by, the course content will be revisited and improvements

will be brought. Before ending let us all congratulate all those who worked on this project and I have much pleasure in launching the Certificate in Tour Guiding.

I thank you for your attention.