Speech of Hon Mahen Kumar Seeruttun

Minister of Agro Industry and Food Security

One Day Stakeholders Validation Workshop

Strategic Plan for Enhancing Tree Cover of Mauritius 2015-2019

Thursday 10 September 2015 @ 9.30 hrs
Conference Hall, BPML
Cyber Tower 1, Ebene

Mr Gondeea, Permanent Secretary

Mr Tezoo, Conservator of Forests
Mr Panchoo, Chief Agricultural Officer

Mr Puttoo, Director National Parks and Conservation Service

Deputy Permanent Secretaries and staff of my Ministry

Chairmen and CEOs of Parastatal Bodies

Representatives of Ministries and departments

Representatives of private sector organisations

Representatives of NGOs

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear Participants

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be amongst you this morning for the opening of this important stakeholders’ workshop to validate the Draft Strategic Plan to Enhance the Tree Cover for the next five year period.

Let me first of all congratulate the Conservator of Forests and his team for the preparation of the Strategic Plan and today I must say we are set to mark a major milestone in the protection of our natural heritage in terms of increasing forest cover and native forests, biodiversity conservation and ensuring a sustainable development.
Very often we forget to realise the importance of trees and forests in our daily lives. Trees and forests in fact play a major role in taking up carbon dioxide and providing clean air in terms of oxygen and therefore sustaining human life and all living organisms.

However, maintaining a tree cover is always a challenge for small island developing states like Mauritius where land is limited and maintaining the balance between economic development and conservation of natural assets is a challenging issue.

The latest estimate which dates back to 2009 shows that the total extent of land under forests in Mauritius is 47,000 hectares (22 000 state owned and 25 000 privately owned) as compared to 57,000 hectares (23 000 state owned and 34 000 privately owned) in 1995. Comparatively, the figures indicate that the extent of private forests has decreased more than state forests during this period.

The proposed strategic plan will need to strike the right balance between enhancing tree cover, increasing our native forests and maintaining our socio economic development. It is indeed a difficult and challenging task. But we have no choice if we want to ensure a harmonious and sustainable development.
Our aim is to increase tree cover and to plant at least 100,000 plants annually for the coming 5 years so that the area under tree cover jumps from 2% to 12%. In our electoral manifesto we stated clearly that we will put in place a programme of re-afforestation. And let me recall that in the last Budget, this Government clearly spelt out that our actions shall be geared towards the environment, I quote…”The need to take urgent and immediate measures for the protection of the environment is compelling. It’s now or never" … end of quote.

Protection of the environment, Ladies and Gentlemen, is above politics and calls for strong and collective collaboration. The private sector, the NGOs and the population at large are being urged to join hands together to save our natural heritage for the future generation. And I can assure you that we have the full support of our Prime Minister sir Anerood Jugnauth in this mission. The programme is for sure quite ambitious but this Government has taken up the challenge to provide the people of Mauritius with an aesthetic environment, where wildlife will thrive in harmony with economic development.

I am confident that with the right approach to sustainable forest management and conservation the trends of biodiversity loss will be reversed and decrease in forest cover will be halted.
Furthermore no stone will remain unturned to further protect and preserve our natural resources. Thus my Ministry is in the process of updating current legislations related to forests and biodiversity to address new emerging issues, and adapt to various threats linked to climate change or invasive species.

The Forest Policy will be reviewed to further protect and better manage our forests. The Forests and Reserves Act will be amended to better control the felling of trees on both state and private forest lands.

The preparation of the new Native Terrestrial Biodiversity and National Parks Bill is being finalised and will soon be introduced for enactment by the National Assembly. The new law aims to enhance the conservation and management of terrestrial biodiversity and address the problem of invasive species which is a major threat to biodiversity. The law will also provide for controlling invasive and other species of wildlife which reach pests levels.

The Ministry is also working on the preparation of the Wetlands Bill which will provide for the protection and sustainable management of wetlands.
You may rest assured that I will personally monitor the strategic plan and see to it that the goals, targets and objectives set are achieved in a timely, effective and efficient manner.

Dear Participants, I trust you will dedicate yourself to this day’s crucial activity and come up with more innovative ideas and proposals, hence I wish you fruitful deliberations and with these few words, I now have the pleasure to declare this validation workshop open.