Signature Ceremony of the Two Technical Cooperation Projects Agreements

Wednesday 31 August 2016

Your Excellency, Dr Jose Graziano Da Silva, Director General FAO

Mr Dabidin, Supervising Officer of my Ministry

Mr Simon Springett, UN Resident Coordinator

Dr Patrice Talla Takoukam, FAO Representative for Mauritius

Mrs Coumba Sow, Attache de Cabinet, FAO

Mrs Liliane Kambirigi, Communication Officer, FAO

Mrs Clotilde Bodiguel, FAO/Smart Fish Programme

Mr Florence Wallemacq, FAO/Smart Fish Programme

Senior Officers of the Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

CEOs of parastatal bodies falling under the aegis of the Ministry

Members of the press

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon,

- It gives me an immense pleasure to welcome in our midst a very special guest - Dr Jose Graziano Da Silva, the Director General FAO as well as the members of his delegation today for the signature of two very important Technical Cooperation Projects Agreements which have recently been approved by the FAO under its technical cooperation programme (TCP).
Let me put on record that our cooperation and collaboration with the FAO dates back to the late 1960s and I must say that we have a very privileged relationship with the FAO.

In fact, since 1968 we have benefitted from technical assistance for the implementation of a number of projects in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors.

The FAO has always unflinchingly supported the Government of Mauritius in the agricultural sector more particularly in difficult times, be it for the management of the swine fever and the re-launching of the pig sector or for the re-launching of the agriculture sector following natural calamities or for the conduct of a census of agriculture.

**Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Whenever requests for technical assistance are sought, the FAO has always responded positively.

One such recent example is the emergency technical assistance that we have sought from the FAO following the outbreak of the Foot and Mouth Disease in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

As you are all aware, after 100 years our livestock sector have had the misfortune of being once more seriously affected by the Foot and Mouth Disease.

This time the first case of the disease was detected in Rodrigues at the beginning of July and the whole island has now been declared as a quarantine zone.

In Mauritius, the first case was detected at the beginning of August. As at date some 1,288 animals have been culled in Mauritius and the culling exercise is ongoing as and where required.
To control the spread of the disease, we have embarked on a ring vaccination programme around the infected zones.

As at date some 5,900 animals have been vaccinated by the Veterinary Officers of the Ministry with the assistance of private vets as well.

To control and eradicate this disease in Mauritius and Rodrigues, we have requested technical assistance from the FAO to inter alia:

- support the vaccination campaign,

- strengthen the Foot and Mouth Disease detection

- raise national awareness and

- review the national Foot and Mouth Disease response plan.

I am informed that our request is being favourably considered and a Technical Cooperation Project is being urgently formulated.

Since we have the privilege of having the Director General FAO with us today, I would like to take this opportunity to thank him personally and on behalf of the Government for all the assistance that the FAO has always provided to the Government of Mauritius for the promotion of the agricultural sector.

We have, in 2014 signed a Country Programming Framework for Mauritius for period 2014-2019 whereby support is being provided by the FAO for the implementation of a number of projects including the two Technical Cooperation Projects Agreements which we will be signing in a few minutes.
• In September 2015, we also received assistance from the FAO under a Technical Cooperation Project for the implementation of the project “Support for the development of organic farming and institutional capacity building in Mauritius”.

• This project is now ongoing and aims at developing organic agriculture in Mauritius, whilst at the same time training farmers on this sustainable agricultural production system and setting the appropriate legislative and certification framework.

• Today we will be signing two other important Agreements for the Ministry, namely the Technical Cooperation Project “Support for Strengthening the National Food Safety and Plant Health Protection Systems in Mauritius” and the Technical Cooperation Project “Support to Forest Code Revision and Institutional Reform in Mauritius”.

• For the implementation of the project to strengthen the National Food Safety and Plant Health Protection Systems, we have received a grant of 380,000 USD and for the other project we have received 298,000 USD. Both projects will be implemented over a period of two years and are expected to be completed by July 2018.

• These two projects are of prime importance for the country and are in line with the vision of Government to enhance food security and food safety.

• Today with the phenomenon of climatic change our agricultural sector is facing a number of challenges and as a Small Island Developing State we are more vulnerable compared to other countries.
• We therefore need to adapt our agriculture to the impact of climate change. In fact, this is the main theme chosen by the FAO this year for the celebration of World Food Day 2016: "Climate is changing. Food and Agriculture must too."

• Climate change is responsible not only for natural calamities such as flash floods, cyclones and droughts but also for the outbreaks of pests and diseases.

• In Mauritius, we do not have early warning systems to alert decision makers and farmers about emerging threats and this compromises food production and food safety.

• Moreover, in the absence of early warning systems, farmers rely heavily on use of synthetic agro chemicals causing harm to both the environment and to people through residues in the produce. This project will enable us to address these shortcomings.

• The objectives of the project will inter alia focus on:

(1) Enhancement of the capacity of plant protection and food safety control systems for the provision of improved public services related to plant health protection and food safety

(2) Improving the capacity of the plant protection and food safety control systems in the formulation and implementation of International Agreements, Regulations, Mechanism and Frameworks for the promotion of transparent markets and enhancement of global and regional market opportunities; and lastly Improvement of mechanisms to monitor plant pests and diseases and incidences of contamination of food for the assessment of associated risks and delivery of integrated and timely early warning.
• Under the project “Support to Forest Code Revision and Institutional Reform in Mauritius”, the FAO will inter alia provide assistance to my Ministry to design the legal and institutional reform of the forestry sector through an evaluation of the existing legal framework in relation to regulations governing land use especially as regards privately owned forest lands and formulation of concrete proposals to open opportunities for economic and sustainable development of our limited forest cover.

• This project is very important as our forest lands are under constant threat with rapid urbanization of the country.

• We badly need policies and legal framework to protect and manage our limited land resources in an ecologically sustainable manner so that we can equally deal with problems associated with climatic change.

• I am informed that procedures have already been initiated by my Ministry for the appointment of two National Project Coordinators for both projects so that they can be implemented without delay.

• Before ending, I would like once again to express my thanks to the FAO and its Director General for the continued support and collaboration with my Ministry for the promotion of the agricultural sector.

Thank you for your attention.