“Let me at the very outset on behalf of the Hon. Prime Minister and the Government of Mauritius express our sincere appreciation to the Government of Australia for the donation of the Wollemi Pine Plant in the context of the 50th Independence anniversary of Mauritius.

This garden in which we are gathered was built by Mahé de Labourdonnais, the first French Governor of Mauritius (then called Isle de France), in the days when the island was administered by the French East Indies Company.
Mahé de Labourdonnais built his house, now commonly known as Chateau Mon Plaisir, as well as, designed his vegetable garden which are today part and parcel of this botanical garden.

However, it was Pierre Poivre who turned this plot of land into a botanical garden.

His dream was to bring spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, clove, and others to Mauritius in order to break the Dutch monopoly on the spice trade.

Since then this garden, a real botanical laboratory has been the safe haven for different specimen of trees, shrubs and plants from different countries.

This invaluable and highly symbolical gift from Australia gives an added dimension to our bilateral relations which in the early days of our history in the 17th century were characterized by explorers and cartographers such
as Abel Tasman or Matthew Flinders using Mauritius as a port of call while on their way to Australia.

Today, through trade and people to people exchange our relations have been enriched and become more dense and multifaceted.

At a time when the challenges facing States and Nations are in fact transborder, the gift of the Wollemi Pine tree, I believe, marks the shift from a purely functionalist relationship into a more organic one based on a new paradigm heralding the need for friendly cooperation at different levels and fora through the inauguration of a new framework of bilateral, regional and international exchanges based on trust and solidarity.

The Wollemi Pine plant while also a testimony to the special diplomatic relations binding our two countries, when Australia in November 1970
opened its first diplomatic representation in independent Mauritius, also
enriches the array of our joint diplomatic action.

Indeed, with the growing world population and increasing demands for
food, huge forests are being converted into farms thereby imperiling the
world’s bio-diversity.

Hence, unless there is a coordinated approach at preserving the world’s
imperiled flora we risk becoming poorer in terms of genetic resources.

At a time of increased movement of people, ideas, as well as, goods and
services, we should also be mindful of the need to preserve our
environment.

In this regard, Mauritius thanks to its insularity has a natural quarantine
system as a result of which our rich and unique flora have been more or
less preserved.
The Government of Mauritius is fully conscious that this important world heritage if properly managed would benefit future generations and the world at large.

This Wollemi Pine plant gifted, of which there exists less than 100 mature trees in the wild, is also a reminder of the 100,000 Australian nationals of Mauritian origin residing in Australia, our original contribution towards the cultural diversity of Australia.

Like us, I have no doubt that our brothers and sisters over there, who have retained so many links with Mauritius would also feel proud of the gift made by the Australian Government to the Government and people of Mauritius.
At the level of the Commonwealth, both Mauritius and Australia are actively engaged in addressing key environmental challenges, notably the halting of tropical deforestation, sustaining the marine environment and exploring ways to maintain ecosystem resilience in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

On the international level, as Contracting Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the RAMSAR Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, the UN Convention on Biodiversity, as well as, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Mauritius pledges to uphold the highest standards in the implementation of all these instruments.

In Australia, we find both a friend and an ally in combating natural calamities and hazards.
Above all, Australia - the island continent - which also faces the challenges encountered by small islands developing States, as well as, continental States, is best placed to understand the dynamics of climate change, rising sea levels, and natural disasters like floods, droughts and typhoons.

Unlike Australia, Mauritius lacks resilience and capacity. We, therefore, feel privileged to have Australia on our side as an active partner supporting us to overcome our vulnerabilities and challenges in the domain of the environment and to achieve sustainable development.

Long live Mauritius-Australia partnership.

I thank you for your kind attention.”