A very good morning to everyone. 

It’s my pleasure to be amongst you for the opening ceremony of this one-day workshop on the management of stray dogs in Mauritius. 

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Professor Martens and Ms. Karen Soeters who have travelled all the way to our island and I wish them a pleasant stay in our beautiful island. I’m confident that together with his team and the stakeholders we will be able to find appropriate solutions to this serious and sensitive problem of stray dogs and help us preserve the pristine beauty of the island.

Professor Martens is not on his first visit to Mauritius.
I had the opportunity to meet him in April last, while he was here on another assignment, and we discussed the problem of stray dogs and, at my request, accepted, without hesitation, to provide consultancy services for dog population management in our country and to bring solutions for my Ministry to deal with the street dogs problems.

We are pleased and grateful to Prof. Pim Martens and his team for accepting to give us a helping hand.

Your presentation, Professor, has been most enlightening and I’m confident that your knowledge and experience, along with your team, will help us in finding the best solutions to deal with the problem of stray dogs in our country.

I am also pleased that Dr. Kurt Barnes is the local partner in your team. Dr. Barnes is an eminent psychologist who has been practising for a long time in Mauritius and knows very well our social fabric. I have no doubt that together you will do a great job.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

No doubt, dogs are wonderful creatures of nature. It’s man’s best friend. A well-treated dog will always be faithful, loving and a wonderful companion.

Dogs help us in countless ways, they make us feel safe and comfortable at home, they help blind people, in rescue operations, they help the police to fight drug dealers, and so on. However, a dog without a home, becomes a nuisance to the society and a source of danger.

It’s also a very sensitive and difficult problem to deal with because it involves moral issues.
Mauritius is currently facing an acute problem of stray dogs which is adversely impacting on the image of Mauritius at local and international levels from economic, environmental and health perspectives.

A study carried out in the year 2013 revealed that the dog population in the island was about 300,000 and, out of those, there were around 80,000 strays. This figure has increased considerably over the last 5 years.

Given the environmental and social hazards associated with stray dogs in terms of public health and safety, road accidents, environmental pollution and above all the safety and welfare of the stray dogs themselves, overpopulation of strays is of increasing concern to the Government, the tourists, foreign investors and the public at large.

The policy of the Government of Mauritius has been focussed over the years on promoting the island as a niche tourist destination and opening up the economy to new sectors so as to attract increased foreign investments and further consolidate the financial resilience of our country.

However, the prevailing situation of stray dogs cast a negative shadow on the image of the country and its animal welfare strategy as a whole.

Let me reiterate the fact that the Mauritian Government is very committed to review this whole situation from an entirely new and humane perspective.

The Honourable Prime Minister has in the last two budgets emphasised the need to address the problem of stray dogs in a more humane manner and by providing for the creation of dog shelters for rehoming the stray dogs.
I would like to remind you that in pursuance of our transformative journey, success has to be measured not only in terms of economic growth but also inclusiveness and sustainability.

To secure sustainable development, we are making significant investment to protect and enhance our environment.

Government has invested an amount of Rs 9 million to upgrade the Veterinary Hospital of the MSAW to ensure a better service for animal welfare and offering a state of the art service to the animals, including the latest technology to treat animals to provide a one stop shop for them.

We have also provided Rs 12 million for a mass sterilisation campaign. Since September 2015, more than nine thousand dogs have been sterilised by the MSAW.

My Ministry has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Humane Society International – HSI – in February this year, with an investment of Rs 13 million, to implement a pilot project for the survey and sterilisation of stray dogs in the east of the island, in the district of Flacq where 11 villages have been identified. The target is to sterilise around 10 000 dogs by March 2019.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**
This consultancy comes at an opportune time when my Ministry is reviewing the legislative framework for animal and public health and welfare and animal production.

A steering committee has been set up under the chair of the Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry to follow closely the drafting of the legislative documents.
The preliminary drafts have been prepared. May I request Professor Martens and his team to give us their learned advice in framing the documents.

Before concluding, I would like to address a few words to the participants. You have been chosen because we believe that you, as stakeholders, can contribute constructively in alleviating the problem of stray dog management.

You have the opportunity to interact with one of the most prominent expert worldwide, in the name Professor Martens who is the founder of “Animal Wise”, a ‘Think and Do Tank’ which integrates scientific knowledge and animal advocacy to drive sustainable change in the relationship between humans and animals and, his team comprising highly competent dedicated experts.

My request to you is to make the best of this day and contribute constructively to identify the most appropriate solutions to this sensitive problem.

I believe that your valuable inputs will contribute to a more scientific approach to deal with this major issue.

With these words, I now have the pleasure in declaring the workshop on Management of Stray Dog Population in Mauritius open and wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.