SIGNATURE CEREMONY FOR THE TCP
BETWEEN THE FAO AND MAURITIUS

MONDAY 25 MARCH
CONFERENCE ROOM

15H30

Let me first extend a warm welcome to Mr Talla Takakoum as we are gathered here for the Signature ceremony for the Technical Cooperation Programme – TCP – between the FAO and the Republic of Mauritius.
The Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security’s mission is to be a driver, catalyst and facilitator for operators in agriculture and agribusiness.

Our Mission is to spearhead the development of small and medium sized commercial and professional agribusiness sector.

Agriculture occupies around 44% of the arable land area.

Land under agricultural production has declined drastically.
In 2002, land under agricultural cultivation was estimated to be approximately 80,000 hectares, of which sugar accounted for 90 %, tea 1 %, other crops 9 %.

The contribution of agriculture in the economy has decreased over the years from 23 % in the late 70’s to 16 % in 1983 and 6 % in 2000.

Sugarcane constitutes the bulk of this share with 53 %.
Food-crops account for 17 %, livestock 12 %, while flowers, fruits and forestry account for the remaining 4 % of the share of Agriculture in the GDP.

Mauritius suffers from a number of inherent constraints, including *inter alia*: a narrow domestic market, land scarcity and a high cost of production which keeps rising.

However, within various existing regional economic platforms, Mauritius is looking forward to contribute
toward a regional development agenda by investing in the region.

Presently my Ministry is actively participating in the PRESAN project being implemented by the FAO and the IOC.

This project, I understand will be of immense value to the Mauritian economy whereby products that are produced locally can find an outreach into the regional market and also good products from the region can be imported to Mauritius at lower costs.
This will ensure fresh products at a cheaper price as well as regional economic activities will be strengthened.

It is essential to recognize the changes in the status of agriculture over the past few decades.

Agriculture has changed from being a Mauritian industry to become part of a ‘small-island-development-state’ industry and is now part of a global industry.
Aware that agriculture, the primary process in the food-chain, needs an effective processing component supported by effective marketing structures if it is to maintain returns, farmers, growers and fishers have come to terms with being part of a demand-oriented market and are sensitized to produce what the customers want rather than what they want to produce.

Today the paradigm shift of citizens is more for quality services, which are convenient, cost effective and safe for health.
Consumers now are increasingly discerning, demanding, vocal, and more knowledgeable about agro and agri products.

One distinct consumer trend has been the switch to products considered healthier and organically produced.

For the promotion of agro-industrial sector and further development of the agricultural sector, the way forward lies in joining hands with all our stakeholders, through concerted strategies towards
achieving our goals in the sugar, non-sugar and fisheries sectors.

In this backdrop of different challenges facing the sector, and after consultations and deliberations with the Forestry Services and the FAREI, agroforestry was identified as a potential growth area and could be a major player in the agricultural sector.

Thus, the support of the FAO was solicited and once again a prompt response was received.
It was with great pleasure, this morning, I was present at the closing workshop for another Technical Cooperation Project in regards to the revision of the Forest Code, i.e. review of the legislative and institutional set up of the Forestry Sector.

It is satisfying to note that we are entering another phase of cooperation by the present signature for technical support in agroforestry and its development to enhance the agricultural sector.
The timing these two events are very suggestive about the seriousness with which we are dealing with challenges in this sector and the pro-activeness of the FAO is commendable.

Let me also thank the FAO for their support in the various other TCP’s currently being implemented in various specialist fields which are concerned with land suitability mapping, review of the fisheries sector, animal and plant health, a biosecurity plan and an animal identification system.
I am sure and without any doubt that this project will be a milestone and a turning point for this vital sector whereby optimal and sustainable use of our scarce agricultural lands will be done wisely and ensuring the well-being of farmers, the consumers and the Mauritian economy.