



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

Address by

Honourable Shakeel MOHAMED,
Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and
Employment

at the

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Mr. President

[Director- General],

It is a great honour and privilege for me to address the 99th Session of the International Labour Conference. My delegation congratulates you and the Vice Presidents on your election and thanks you for guiding us very ably.

We are also grateful to the Director General for his stimulating report and we echo his call for a balanced policy strategy for securing a jobs-rich recovery in the face of new threats to the global economy.

Mr. President,

The Government of Mauritius which took office in 2005 was again sworn-in following general elections last month. These elections were hailed as being fair and free by all the international observers: This bespeaks of a vibrant and mature democracy.

Under its new mandate, the Government will continue, with more vigour, its sustainable development strategies, encompassing poverty alleviation, employment generation and uplift of the living conditions of the population. The principles of **Unity**, **Equity** and **Modernity** will underpin the pursuits of Government.

Mr. President,

These principles are a response to injustice anywhere. It is, therefore, very appalling to witness the continued plight of the Palestinian people, as depicted in the Director-General's report on the *Situation of Workers in the Occupied Arab Territories*.

The solidarity of Mauritius with the Palestinian people is unequivocal. We are, therefore, deeply concerned by the military raid on the Gaza-bound humanitarian aid convoy in international waters causing tragic loss of lives and casualties. Mauritius strongly condemns this unilateral action by Israel, in particular the disproportionate use of force against unarmed civilians. The blockade of the Gaza strip is unacceptable and we join calls for its unimpeded access to humanitarian aid. We look forward to a unified and sovereign Palestinian State taking its rightful place in the concert of nations.

Mr. President,

Hardly had the world of work adjusted itself to the pernicious effects of the financial crises of 2008 and 2009 that we are struck by another financial crisis in the Euro zone. Vulnerable and export-oriented island economies like Mauritius will be among the hardest hit

by such recurring economic upheavals and financial volatility, hence our plea for timely and concerted action for bringing the requisite systemic changes in the international financial architecture and promoting a fair, inclusive and development-led globalization.

In this respect, we call for the formal inclusion of Africa in the G20 Summit to allow my continent to effectively engage with the G20 process and be part of determining the global development agenda. Exclusion from a process which aims at enhancing global coordination to help restore global economic growth or participation in it merely as a special guest of the G20 rotating chair system can only question the representative-ness and legitimacy of the process as well deny Africa a sense of ownership of outcomes, especially in the light of the recognition that the current crisis has a disproportionate impact on Africa and compounds further its development challenges.

Mr. President,

It is precisely in anticipation of such challenges that Mauritius engaged a process of wide-ranging reforms over the past to strengthen economic resilience. Such resilience provided us with fiscal space to adopt a package of budgetary measures to assist, amongst others, enterprises in difficulty and preserve employment. At the same time, necessary changes were brought to our labour legislation to enhance the social protection system which was able to cushion the loss of income as a result of loss of jobs.

As the new Minister of Labour, I shall build on these policy measures with greater focus on saving jobs and preventing closures of firms and protecting workers.

Mr. President,

It is in this perspective that Mauritius welcomes ILO deliberations on “Decent Work for Domestic Workers”. With the increase in ageing populations and working mothers, the importance of service providers for caring and cleaning at home is accruing. In cognizance thereof, the Government of Mauritius has, since 1983, given legal status to domestic work by regulating wages and conditions of employment. Additionally, our legislation provides comprehensive protection with respect to freedom of association, social security, daily and weekly rest, maternity leave and against unfair dismissals and workplace violence. Undoubtedly, therefore, ILO’s standards will help strengthen our legislative framework in this area.

Mr. President,

Mauritius will also support ILO recommendations on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work. Alive to this health challenge, the Government of Mauritius has enacted various measures, such as the HIV/AIDS Preventive Measures Act. In close collaboration with NGOs, UNAIDS and WHO, Government adopted a national Multi-sectoral Strategic

Framework for HIV/AIDS 2007-2011. We need to build on this framework and we are convinced that ILO recommendations will guide us in this respect.

Mr. President,

While the world gloomy economic outlook threatens employment, we need to underscore that work is the mainstay of livelihood, social integration and identity. Government action in Mauritius will, therefore, continue to focus on employment creation and poverty alleviation. With the support of the ILO, we hope to soon finalize a **National Employment Policy** (which is my priority) which will also reflect outcomes of debates under the **ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization on Employment**.

Mr. President,

With respect to child labour, I am pleased to inform this august body that Mauritius has ratified the two ILO Core Conventions on Child Labour. We have, accordingly, introduced various implementation measures. These include the Child Protection Act to ensure protection against all forms of abuse, the Ombudsperson for Children Act and the **Employment Rights Act** which prohibits the employment of persons aged below 16 in line with the Education Act providing for compulsory education up to the age of 16.

Mr. President,

Instead of being a pretext for inertia, the economic downturn challenges us all to reengineer our policy and seek innovative approaches that work for our people and for sustainable economic recovery in keeping with the principles of broad-based social dialogue and the Decent Work Country Programme. Let us then rise to this challenge, bearing in mind the wise words of our Director-General [Quote] *“We cannot afford the risk of economic recovery without a decent work recovery”* [Unquote]. We shall compare notes next year.

Thank you.