

ADDRESS BY HON. JEAN FRANÇOIS CHAUMIERE
MINISTER OF LABOUR, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS &
EMPLOYMENT

Launching of Human Development Report, 2009

on

**"Overcoming barriers: Human
Mobility and Development"**

Organised by UNDP

Date: 05 November 2009

Time: 09.30 hrs

Venue: Labourdonnais Hotel

Mrs Asha Kannan, UNDP Resident Representative

Ms Lalini Veerassamy, Representative from International Office for Migrations

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am indeed extremely pleased to be associated with the launching of the **Human Development Report 2009** in Mauritius. I am also thankful to the UNDP for having invited me to address you on this occasion.

The Human Development Report (HDR), as many among you may be aware, was first launched in 1990 with the single goal of putting people back at the centre of the development process in terms of economic debate, policy and advocacy. This human development approach aroused partly as a result of growing criticism to the leading development approach of the 1980's, which were perceived as a close link between national economic growth and the expansion of individual human choices.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The work of Prof. Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate in Economics and of such renowned economists as Dr. Mahbud-UI-Haq, provided the foundation for an alternative and broader human development approach. This was defined as a process of enlarging people's choice and enhancing human capabilities and freedoms, enabling them to live a long and healthy life, have access to knowledge and a decent standard of living, and participate in the life of their community and decisions affecting their lives.

Prof. Amartya Sen has rightly said, I quote: "*Human development, as an approach, is concerned with what I take to be the basis development idea: namely, advancing the **richness of human life**, rather than the **richness of the economy** in which human beings live*" unquote.

As from the 1990's, the human development concept was applied to a systematic study of global themes, as published in the yearly global Human Development Reports under the auspice of the UNDP.

These reports place human development at the forefront of national political agenda. They are tools for policy analysis reflecting people's priorities, strengthening national capacities, engaging national partners, identifying inequalities and measuring progress.

Human Development Reports serve as bench-marks and as reference for measuring human progress, triggering action for change and addressing specific human development approaches to human rights, poverty, education, economic reform, HIV/AIDS and globalisation.

Incidentally, *putting people first* is not merely a slogan of the present government, but rather it also reflects our sincere commitment to the ideals and goals as enunciated in subsequent Human Development Reports of the UNDP. We have every reason to be proud for our achievements when Mauritius is placed among the **High Human Development Countries** in the **2009 Human Development Report**, and is given a ‘honourable’ ranking in the **Human Development Index**.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Focus on this year’ Human Development Report is on “Human Mobility and Development”, a theme which is very appropriate in the present context. It has indeed come at an opportune time when human mobility has become one of the most complex issues facing the world today.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 13-2), “**Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country**”. If the right to emigrate is acknowledged, what about the corresponding right to immigrate? This question is of particular relevance because contemporary migration policies are increasingly characterised by a restrictive spirit that makes international mobility problematic.

While skilled workers circulate quite easily, those who do not belong to this elite have little access to migration opportunities, at least within a legal framework. In the meantime, globalisation has increased the mobility of capital, information, goods and even services, thus making the non-liberalisation of human mobility the exception rather than the rule. Consequently, these diverging patterns in international mobility take place in a context characterised by the contestation of this order by irregular migration flows and by receiving states’ legitimate attempts to stop them.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Human mobility is indeed on the increase worldwide. While migration is an age-old phenomenon, its current scale and particularly characteristics make it an issue of rising global concern. Worldwide, more than 214 million people are now living outside their country of origin. Migration is spurred by economic opportunity, political turmoil, family reunification, war and environmental crisis.

Flows of migrants have profound economic, security, social, and cultural effects in the countries of origin, and destination. In recent years, the international community has been paying attention to research and **policy issues** emerging from mobility. Question around migration and its impact on development, both in origin and receiving countries are more frequent. A huge gap also persists at the policy level by two separate agenda: one in the receiving countries concerning how to manage flows; the other in the origin countries about the effects and the impact of migration on development.

Other questions relate to issues of human and workers rights, human trafficking, civic rights, state security, amongst many others.

The 2009 Human Development Report explores how better policies towards human mobility can enhance human development. It lays out the case for governments to reduce restrictions on movement within and across their borders, so as to expand human choices and freedoms. The report argues for practical measures that can improve prospects on arrival, which in turn will have large benefits both for destination communities and for places of origin.

As regards the rights of migrants, the HDR 2009 highlights the Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration developed by the ILO. This framework provides guidelines and good practices within a non-binding framework that recognises the sovereign right of all states to determine their own migration policies. This “soft law” type of approach accommodates the inherent differences between states and allows for gradual implementation.

Even in the absence of formal ratification of conventions, there is no reason for any government to deny such basic migrant rights as the right to:

- equal remuneration for equal work, decent working conditions and protection of health and safety;
- organise and bargain collectively;
- not be subject of arbitrary detention and be subject of due process in the event of deportation;
- not be subject to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment; and
- return to countries of origin.

The HRD Report also highlights on the role of stakeholders, ranging from government and consular services, to employers, trade unions and NGO's in ensuring that basic rights of migrants are respected. I am happy to say that Mauritius has not only reformed its labour and employment laws and other related legislation, but has also taken an array of measures with a view to better protect migrant workers in our territory. In this context, we are also finalising the **Occupational Safety & Health (Employees Lodging Accommodation) Regulations** – to provide better accommodation for migrant workers. In addition to these, my Ministry is presently finalising the **Decent Work Country Programme Document**. The implementation of the decent work programmes will certainly impact positively on the quality of life of all workers, including migrant workers.

Mauritius, as the HRD Report says, has, as a small state, made migration a strategic element of development efforts. We have about 36,000 expatriates living and working in our territory, particularly in the construction and manufacturing sectors. Indeed, expatriates are playing and will continue to play a crucial role in the economic development of our island.

On the other hand, as the HRD reports confirms, Mauritius has actively encouraged temporary employment abroad as a way of acquiring skills and capital that migrants can use to set up their own business in return. Supported by donors, government has established a programme that provides technical and financial support to returning migrants.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mauritius became a member of the **International Organisation for Migration** (IOM) in 2006. In collaboration with the IOM, the government is presently implementing a **Circular Migration Project** which aims at identifying employment opportunities abroad, and training Mauritians in the skills required to facilitate their placement in these jobs. Circular migration may contribute to the attainment of the **Millenium Development Goals**, e.g. through generating remittances and investments or by improving the human capital. It is well-known that migrants often remit a larger share of their earnings if involved in a temporary and circular migration than if they emigrate permanently and gradually lose ties with the source country. Circular migration can also address oversupply of labour and underemployment and contribute to the global distribution of skills through brain circulation.

Mauritius has up to now, received, through the IOM, offers from companies in Canada. The government has also signed a bilateral agreement with the French Government in September 2008 relating to “*séjour et migration circulaire de professionnels*”. This agreement contains a list of occupations/sectors in which Mauritian nationals may be employed in France and this includes the construction, catering, agriculture and fisheries

sectors. Implementation will follow, once this agreement is ratified by the French Parliament. In addition, we have also signed an agreement with the government of the People's Republic of China on bilateral labour service cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is growing evidence that the international movement of people can offer benefits on a global scale similar to or greater than free trade and free capital movements. This potential is most likely to be realised through more cooperative frameworks that recognise and encourage circularity as a dynamic pattern of transnational movement, not just a means of avoiding the challenges of immigrant integration or illegal migration. The exact nature of this cooperative "mobility" framework will differ from context to context as countries of origin and destination together arrive at the appropriate mix of conditions, safeguards and incentives that foster human mobility and circularity to their mutual benefit.

The Human Development Report 2009 has brought to the fore the extraordinarily unequal distribution of opportunities and how this is a major driver of the movement of people. The report calls for a bold vision and identifies a long-term agenda for capturing the large unrealised gains to human development from current and future mobility.

In addition to positive inter-actions between governments and existing international forums on migration that can help to review challenges and share experiences, the report suggests that, even on a unilateral basis, governments can take measures to improve outcomes for both international and internal movers. In fact, in the report, it is also emphasised that the key reforms with respect to the treatment of migrants and the improvement of destination community outcomes are entirely within the jurisdiction of national governments.

I sincerely believe that the HRD Report 2009 will certainly contribute in a long way towards spear-heading reforms to government policies and institutions that could bring about sizeable human development gains from internal and international mobility.

I thank you for your kind attention.

I have now the pleasure to officially launch the **Human Development Report, 2009** entitled: **Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development**.

I thank you again.