



**REVIEW OF THE EIGHTH PERIODIC REPORT OF MAURITIUS**

**STATEMENT**

**by**

**The Honourable Mrs Fazila JEEWA-DAUREEAWOO, GCSK,**

**Vice-Prime Minister**

**Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands**

**Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family**

**Welfare**

**of the Republic of Mauritius**

**at the**

**71<sup>ST</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE  
ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN  
(CEDAW)**

**Tuesday 30 October 2018**

**Geneva**

*Check against delivery*

**Madam Chairperson,**

**Distinguished Members of the Committee,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**All protocols observed,**

**Good Morning to everyone.**

1. It is an honour for me and members of my delegation to be here today for a constructive dialogue with the Committee. We shall endeavour to enlighten you on actions taken by the Republic of Mauritius to empower women and promote gender equality since our last review in October 2011.

Allow me to first introduce the members of my delegation.

- **Mr. RajkumarSookun**, Acting Permanent Representative of Mauritius in Geneva;
- **Mrs. PrameetaGoordyal-Chitto**, Assistant Solicitor General at the Attorney General`s Office;
- **Mr AveenashAppadoo**, Head Planning and Research Unit of my Ministry;
- **Mr ParasramGopaul**, Counsellorat the Mauritius Permanent Mission in Geneva;
- **Mr. Nikesh Heerowa and Mrs. Fee Young Li Pin Yuen**, both Second Secretaries at the Mauritius Permanent Mission in Geneva.

**Madam Chairperson,**

**Reporting Obligations**

2. The Republic of Mauritius has submitted its 8<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report under Article 18 of the Convention using the Simplified Reporting Procedure for the first time. The Republic of Mauritius is supportive of the Simplified Reporting Procedure to strengthen and enhance the functioning of the human rights treaty body system. It is of great value to Small Island Developing States with limited resources and it is an effective tool to reduce the workload of States.

3. At the outset, allow me to reiterate that our Government holds the CEDAW Convention and your Committee in very high esteem. Obligations under CEDAW are viewed very seriously. Let me reassure the Committee that the recommendations from our last review have, to a large extent, been acted upon.

4. It is an honour that a former member of your Committee Mrs Pramila Patten has been appointed by the United Nations Secretary General as his Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict at the level of Under-Secretary-General. We have another member, Justice Aruna Devi Narain, who was elected to the CEDAW Committee this year, for a term of four years.

5. I shall touch upon commitments of the Government of Mauritius at regional and international levels and provide an overview of measures carried out policy-wise, followed by developments in the legal framework.

6. You will be pleased to note that last year in June, the Republic of Mauritius acceded to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

7. In the wake of the celebrations of the fifty years of our country's independence in March 2018, significant progress has been made towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in terms of political will at the highest levels of decision making.

### **Women in Decision Making**

8. A new Government with the mission of "**Achieving Meaningful Change**" was elected in December 2014. For the first time in our history we have had a lady as President of the Republic of Mauritius from 2015 to March 2018. A lady has also been appointed as Speaker of the National Assembly and since December 2017, I have myself been appointed as Vice Prime Minister. This demonstrates the willingness of Government to address the representation of women in decision-making positions.

9. Additional measures to increase participation of women in leadership positions, include:

- The new Code of Corporate Governance (2016) – launched in February 2017;
- Capacity building programmes and awareness campaigns on the pertinence of having more women at different levels of decision making instances;

- Different coaching and training programmes in Rodrigues to empower women involved in Politics, Civil Service, Entrepreneurship and unemployed women through a Women Leaders Programme since 2017; the target is to reach around 1500 women by the year 2022.

### **Women in Politics and Electoral Reform**

10. Currently, out of the 69 Members of the National Assembly, eight (8) are women (i.e. 11.6%), two of whom are Ministers, a weakness which needs to be addressed. To ensure a better gender representation so as to guarantee an enhanced representation of women in the National Assembly, Government has recently circulated a Ministerial Report on Electoral Reform in September 2018. The Ministerial Committee has recommended that a gender-neutral formula of at least one third of the candidates be of the same sex for each party or party alliance, both from the First Past the Post and the Proportional Representation List.

11. With the introduction of a new Local Government Act in 2011, providing that any group presenting more than two candidates in an electoral ward during municipal and village council elections shall ensure that its candidates are not of the same sex, there has been an increase in the number of women standing as candidates and elected at the local elections. Furthermore, the Constitution was amended in December 2016 to provide for a minimum number of candidates for elections to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to be of a particular sex with a view to ensuring adequate representation of each sex in the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

## **Ranking of Mauritius**

12. In 2017, my Ministry with the assistance of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa published the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI) Report for Mauritius: the first index that the country has ever produced to measure gender equality and women empowerment in the country. The report shows that the country has made significant strides towards gender equality and women's empowerment and compliance with the relevant international standards.

13. In the same year, the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Mauritius as the 16<sup>th</sup> most democratic nation in the world, illustrating the commitment of the Government to strengthen the existing democratic and human rights architecture. Mauritius also retained its first place on the Mo Ibrahim Index relating to governance performance in African Countries. The Rating for Mauritius was 0.781 in the 2016 Human Development Report. Consequently, Mauritius is placed in the high human development category and positions itself at 64 out of 188 countries and territories.

## **Gender Parity in Primary Education**

14. We have also achieved gender parity in enrolment in primary education, by closing the gap between girls and boys, while attaining universal primary education through the provision of free education in Mauritius.

**Madam Chairperson,**

### **Challenges**

15. The Republic of Mauritius, like other countries across the world, needs to address structural barriers still undermining the attainment of gender equality. These include gender based violence in various forms; difficulties faced by women in balancing their personal and professional life and under representation of women in decision-making positions. The Government of the Republic of Mauritius has adopted a multi-sectorial approach to address these challenges.

### **National Gender Policy Framework**

16. As you may be aware, Government adopted a National Gender Policy Framework since 2008. This framework is being reviewed to be aligned with Agenda 2030 with the assistance of the UNDP. This new framework will be used as an effective tool for Ministries to revisit their gender policies in order to enable the removal of barriers that undermine women in different sectors. There is also a National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming which provides a platform for active engagement with Gender Focal Points of all Ministries.

17. We shall further engage with the private sector and NGOs in the process of gender mainstreaming. In fact, the European Union is supporting my Ministry under its Technical Cooperation Facility to set up Gender Working Groups for the private sector, academia, the media and Civil Society Organisations in that respect.

My Ministry has also obtained technical assistance from the European Union for, *inter alia*:

- Capacity Building on Gender Mainstreaming; and
- Capacity Development for Gender Analysis.

18. Subsequently, a joint monitoring framework agreement on the EU-Mauritius Gender Action Plan was also signed between my Ministry and the European Union on 07 May 2018 to monitor progress on selected objectives at the level of the National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming on the following:

- freedom from all forms of violence against girls and women in the public and private sphere;
- elimination of all forms of trafficking of girls; and
- promotion, protection and fulfilment of rights to sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health.

19. For the Financial Year 2016/2017, Government introduced, on a pilot basis, a Vote Item on “Gender Mainstreaming”, which has since been sustained. This initiative has allowed Ministries to implement specific activities to address sectoral gender gaps.

20. A stand-alone pillar on gender equality principles has been incorporated in our Budget 2018/2019, among which there are key measures including:

1. the introduction of a Gender Equality Bill to set a strong and comprehensive legal framework for gender mainstreaming;
2. the allocation of approximately five thousand eight hundred US Dollars (two hundred thousand Mauritian Rupees) to each Ministry to implement gender

responsive initiatives which works out to a total of approximately USD one hundred and thirty three thousand for all Ministries;

3. training of 250 government officials to deal with gender issues;
4. amendments to the Employment Rights Act to allow paid maternity leave for mothers with less than 12 months service; and
5. the introduction of the Work at Home Scheme to move beyond the traditional workspace and increase productivity.

**Madam Chairperson,**

### **Sustainable Development Goal 5**

21. In line with SDG5, Government has taken steps to empower girls on issues such as Sexual and Reproductive Health, Values, Leadership and Substance Abuse amongst others. We shall ensure that this is an ongoing exercise.

### **Gender-Based Violence**

22. We have provided in our report information on measures being taken to address violence against women in line with General Recommendations 12 and 19 of CEDAW. Our challenge is to have concrete policies in place for perpetrators' rehabilitation also and we are seeking the assistance of the UNDP to devise tailor-made programmes for each agency working with perpetrators in that respect.

23. We are also in the process of setting up an Integrated Support Centre to provide immediate, consistent, coordinated and timely support and counselling to victims on a 24 hour basis. With this new system, several telephone lines will be made available to respond promptly to a greater number of calls from victims of domestic violence.

24. In a bid to address the issue of Gender Based Violence in Rodrigues, the Commissioner for Women's Affairs has set up a Steering Committee in 2017. An action plan to support victims of domestic violence in Agalega has also been prepared.

25. My Ministry is continuously innovating its strategies and in that regard, a Family Welfare Mobile Application, as part of the series of initiatives under Gender Mainstreaming Programme, has been introduced in June 2018 to ensure the protection of women by alerting authorities promptly. The new Citizen Support Portal is yet another initiative of Government providing an online proximity service which allows citizens to transmit their concerns to relevant authorities. The Portal is also another medium through which cases of Gender Based Violence are closely monitored and attended to.

26. In the same line, since 2015, a "*Service de Proximité*" through the use of a mobile caravan has been introduced to reach out to women, children and elderly people in remote areas. Various services and activities are extended to them, including talks on subjects like family welfare, well-being of children, and parenting skills for family empowerment, amongst others.

27. Furthermore, there is a network of fifty seven Social Welfare Centres, one hundred and fifty seven Community Centres and fifteen Women Empowerment Centres operating under the aegis of my Ministry across the island, which is of

2,040 km<sup>2</sup>. This ensures that awareness campaigns on a wide variety of issues including gender equality and women's empowerment are reaching the community at large. I always make it a duty to attend such gatherings and personally advocate for gender equality with the civil society and private and public organisations.

**Madam Chairperson,**

### **Addressing Stereotypes**

28. To address stereotypes, boys are encouraged to enrol for subjects which have so far attracted more girls and this with the objective of breaking gender stereotypes. Gender networks have also been established within academic institutions to familiarise students with gender equality discourse and inculcate the concept of gender equality among the youth.

We do acknowledge that more efforts will need to be made to encourage gender parity in enrolment rates in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics as well as in Technical and Vocational Education Centre domains.

### **Women and Health**

29. With respect to Article 12, our Government has given special attention with regard to women's diseases such as breast and cervical cancer, Alzheimer and the feminisation of our ageing population. To ensure that the women from Rodrigues and Agalega Islands are not deprived of adequate health services, those needing specialised treatment are moved to Mauritius as required. Concurrently, a team of medical personnel generally proceeds to Rodrigues and Agalega to

cater for the people. Financial assistance of approximately one hundred and fifteen US Dollars (four thousand Mauritian Rupees) will be provided to all pregnant women proceeding to Mauritius from Agalega for delivery. Actions will also be initiated for the upgrading of the medical services in Agalega. In the meantime, an additional doctor has been sent to Agalega to serve the Agalean community in the South Island.

### **Gender and Climate change**

30. I wish to highlight that the issue of climate change has already been dealt with in paragraphs 135 to 153 of our Report.

Moreover, as Chairperson of the Ministerial Committee to review the existing Protocol on cyclone and flashfloods, all necessary measures will be taken to ensure that women and children do not bear the negative impact of climate change.

**Madam Chairperson,**

### **Economic Empowerment of Women**

31. With regard to Articles 13 and 14 of CEDAW, the Government has put in place various programmes to promote women's economic empowerment. For instance, the National Women Entrepreneur Council published a directory of women entrepreneurs. My Ministry also organises regional sales exhibitions and activities where women entrepreneurs can present their products and services to the public.

32. The SME Mauritius Limited has also come up with a ten-year Master Plan for small and medium enterprises which includes a number of measures for women, empowering them through entrepreneurial activities.

33. In addition, the National Skills Development Programme makes provision for technical training of three thousand youths, who will be awarded a “Competency Certificate” that they have developed soft skills including discipline, communication and work ethics to support them in employment.

34. I am also pleased to inform the Committee that in August 2018, my Ministry organised a Conference on “*Women’s Economic Empowerment: A Pre-Requisite for Sustainable Development*” with delegates from nineteen Indian Ocean Rim Association Members States. The outcome of the Conference has been a declaration on women’s economic empowerment and a Work Plan on the priority areas of the Indian Ocean Rim Association which will ultimately contribute to women’s economic empowerment.

### **Eradication of Poverty**

35. Government is fully committed to eradicating absolute poverty. In this respect, it has reviewed the existing poverty threshold and introduced the Subsistence Allowance Scheme under which every adult on the Social Register of Mauritius, is entitled to a monthly subsistence allowance based on a minimum threshold of two hundred and seventy US Dollars approximately (nine thousand five hundred and twenty Mauritian Rupees) for a family of two adults and three children. This new poverty threshold is forty per cent higher than that of the World Bank.

**Madam Chairperson,**

## **Addressing matters of concern in the Concluding Observations**

36. With regard to the exemption to the prohibition of discrimination contained in section 16(4) of the Constitution in relation to personal status laws, this is a sensitive issue which can only be resolved through further debates and consultations.

37. Insofar as temporary special measures are concerned as per Article 4 of CEDAW, we do take on board the remarks made by the Committee and will give due consideration on this issue.

38. The issue of teenage pregnancy is one major challenge we are faced with. There are ongoing efforts in terms of increasing awareness campaigns and preventive measures being carried out at the level of stakeholders. To ensure equal access to education and to encourage teenage pregnant girls to continue school after giving birth, the few students who fall pregnant are allowed to attend classes and are encouraged to resume school after childbirth. Special arrangements are made for those who have to sit for the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate.

39. The issue relating to criminalisation of marital rape is still under consideration. However, the amendment brought to the Protection from Domestic Violence Act in 2016 has enlarged the definition of domestic violence to include compelling the spouse or the other person by force or threat to engage in any conduct or act, sexual or otherwise, from which the spouse or the other person has the right to abstain.

40. It is to be noted that our laws, namely the Equal Opportunities Act, the Employment Rights Act and the Employment Relations Act recognise sexual orientation. The Government has noted with serious concern the incident that arose during an event organised by the LGBTI community in June 2018. Given that the Republic of Mauritius is a multi-cultural society, there is a need to exercise caution in addressing LGBTI and to seek the consensus of all the components of our society. It is noteworthy that the LGBTI group is nevertheless represented on the National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow up on Treaty Bodies under the aegis of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.

41. With respect to the ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, it will not be possible to allow migrant workers to come to Mauritius with their families, in view of the country being geographically small and having limited resources.

42. With regard to the dissemination of the Concluding Observations of CEDAW, we will do our best to address this recommendation.

**Madam Chairperson,**

**Legislation**

43. I now propose to apprise the Committee of positive developments in respect of legislation pertaining to the protection of human rights especially in regard to women.

44. The Independent Police Complaints Commission Act was proclaimed in April 2018 and is operational. It is headed by a former lady judge of the Supreme Court. The Commission investigates complaints, other than acts of corruption, made against police officers in the discharge of their functions.

45. The Employment Rights Act was amended in 2015 to increase maternity leave from 12 weeks to 14 weeks. It provides that every employer shall ensure that the remuneration of any worker shall not be less favourable than that of another worker performing work of equal value. Since 2009, Section 31 of the Act makes provision for five continuous days of paternity leave.

46. Under sections 8 and 23 of the National Wage Consultative Council Act 2016, the National Minimum Wage is now law in the Republic of Mauritius. The National Minimum Wage Regulations 2017 provides for the payment of a monthly national minimum wage of approximately two hundred and thirty five US Dollars (eight thousand one hundred and forty Mauritian Rupees) from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 for all full time employees, and a pro rata rate for part time workers. The Ministry of Labour, Employment and Industrial Relations is monitoring the situation and has initiated action against defaulting companies.

47. The new National Women's Council Act came into operation on 8 March 2018 to provide for a more modern legislative framework and better functioning of the National Women's Council as a platform for women to voice out their needs and aspirations.

**Madam Chairperson,**

### **Trafficking in Persons**

48. With regards to Trafficking in Persons, the Committee will be pleased to know that we are no longer on the Tier-two watch list. An Inter-Ministerial Committee has been set up under the chair of the Attorney-General, and at present issues of Trafficking in Persons are being closely monitored by the Ministry of Defence and Rodrigues. A draft National Action Plan is in the process of being finalized. Measures are currently being taken to inform migrant workers of their rights with the aim of addressing the questions of forced labour and sexual exploitation and sensitizing them on their rights.

49. The present Government, under the leadership of the Hon. Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth is determined to provide a human rights-based approach to the socio-economic and cultural development of the country. A new Ministry dedicated to Human Rights has been set up in September 2017 and issues pertaining to Human Rights are being addressed in a more comprehensive manner. A National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-Up, commonly known as NMRF, has been set up under the said Ministry as per the recommendations of the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights. The NMRF has become the platform for consultations with NGOs and civil society

on a regular basis under the chair of the Attorney General, Minister of Justice, Human Rights and Institutional Reforms.

50. This new framework aims to ensure that Human Rights obligations are fully met and that Periodic Reports and mid-term Progress Reports are submitted in a timely manner after consultations with all parties concerned. Furthermore, it ensures better coordination amongst Ministries for the implementation of recommendations.

51. With these remarks, Madam Chair and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I hope I have been able to brush on a number of issues that the Committee will surely wish to take up with us during the constructive dialogue. The Concluding Observations on our previous periodic reports have been of great help in enabling us to review our human rights situation in relation to CEDAW.

52. I thank you for your attention.