

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS TO UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS

Reduit, 9 May 2016

“Mo bien contente visite sa jolie paie Maurice... et surtout joine banne jeunes de Universite de Maurice!” [I’m happy to be in beautiful Mauritius and with the young people of the University of Mauritius]

It is wonderful to be here and I am deeply grateful for the honour that you bestow upon me today.

Above all, I see this as recognition of the work of the United Nations.

I thank you on behalf of all my colleagues serving in the name of peace, development and human rights around the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is my second day in your wonderful country.

I have felt the warmth of your people. I have seen the beauty of your landscape. I have sensed the vibrant pulse of your country.

You are a country of migration – the people of Mauritius can trace their roots to all parts of the world. Everyone is from somewhere else.

To my mind, it illuminates a 21st century truth:

No country no matter how big can solve problems alone; every country no matter how small can be part of the solution.

Mauritius proves that every day.

You are a leader for Small Island Developing States.

You are one of the strongest and most developed economies in the African region.

And, of course, you are a global example of unity in diversity.

You continue to show how to build a tolerant society where different races, ethnicities, religions and cultures co-exist in peace and harmony.

“La nation arc en ciel.”

As we look around the world, we face big challenges.

Families everywhere are worried about jobs and the lingering economic crisis.

Terrible unrest continues from Sahel to Syria and beyond.

Climate change has our planet both stressed and stretched.

These are just some of the big tests the world faces today.

But I am confident we can meet these challenges together.

Perhaps I will not receive a geography degree for saying this, but in today's world, no country is an island.

When we look to 21st century challenges, even Mauritius is not an island.

We are tied together. People and policies are connected like never before.

And perhaps our greatest challenge is to see beyond the boundaries of geography, ethnicity, religion, race.

And also beyond the traditional boundaries of policymaking that place education policy in one box – environment in another– health somewhere else.

Today I want to talk about two essential ways that we can look beyond divides and make the most of the 21st century.

First, by truly advancing sustainable development – and second, by empowering women and young people.

First, the sustainable development challenge.

I have made sustainable development the top priority of the United Nations.

We desperately need to act together to build a sustainable future.

Mauritius knows this well.

Small Island Developing States are on the frontlines of climate change and sea-level rise – and were sounding the alarm long before climate change was on the international agenda.

In fact, the first international blueprint of the 21st century addressing the needs of Small Island Developing States was developed right here. It was known throughout the world as the Mauritius Strategy.

Last year, the international community adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – a global blueprint to end poverty, leave no one behind and expand opportunity in a people-centered, planet-friendly way.

I commend Mauritius for your Vision 2030 approach to inclusive growth, harnessing the power of the blue economy and advancing sustainable development.

Everyone can and must be a part of the dialogue and the solutions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

That leads me to what I am convinced is another essential key to making the most of the opportunities of the 21st century – empowering the world's women and young people.

Half the world's people are women – and half are under 25 years of age.

Wherever I go, I urge leaders to put more women in decision making roles. More women in the Cabinet. More women in Parliament. More women in business and academia.

Here in Mauritius, starting from your own President, women are taking a leadership role. As I do everywhere, I urge you to do even more to ensure more women can play a full role for all society.

At the same time, empowering young people is crucial.

Young people are worried about jobs and decent work. Here in Mauritius, youth employment is over 20 per cent, as it is in many other parts of the world.

Young people also want a greater say in the decisions that affect their lives.

Economic empowerment and political empowerment go hand-in-hand.

Education is a key to both.

I know Mauritius has made education a high priority. I was impressed to learn that not only is education free in your country including at the university level – but so, too, is public transportation to school.

I want to salute your efforts to put education first.

I know what a difference this can make. I know this as United Nations Secretary-General. But, for me, it is even more personal.

I grew up just after the Korean war. My village, my school, were destroyed.

The United Nations came in and helped us turn things around.

The UN was a beacon of hope for me and my country – and it changed everything.

It made me a global citizen.

You have so much to be proud of being from Mauritius. But I also urge you to look beyond – to recognize there are no islands in the 21st century – and to be a global citizen.

Mauritius joined the the United Nations soon after its independence almost half a century ago.

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam – the independence leader and first Prime Minister of Mauritius – delivered the first address to the United Nations.

He said “We as a small nation will bring our contribution...to the shaping of the destiny of a better world – a contribution which we hope will lead towards a new and broader world civilization in which man’s essential needs will transcend consideration of national self-interest.”

As we look to the future, let us take inspiration from those words.

Take strength from all your country and this wonderful University have to offer.

And take to heart your university motto: Transforming lives, inspiring change.

I count on you. I know you can do it. Help us build a better world.