

**Address of Hon (Mrs) L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun**  
**Minister of Education and Human Resources,**  
**Tertiary Education and Scientific Research**  
**41<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the University Court**  
**Thursday 27 July 2017**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

**With due observance of all Protocols**

Good Afternoon.

This is the third year in a row that I am present for a meeting of the University of Mauritius Court.

Obviously, this Court carries with it a major responsibility: that of ensuring the effective management of the University as well as that of planning its future development. I am therefore pleased to see the diversity of expertise that has been brought together today such that new ideas and proposals can lead to the attainment of the strategic aims of the University.

At the very outset, allow me to extend my warm congratulations to the new management team of the University. I am deeply convinced that both the Vice Chancellor and the 2 Pro Vice-Chancellors will, collaboratively with the Council, ensure the university gets its due deserves in terms of repute and prestige.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Nobody denies the fact that, over the more than a half-century of its existence, the UoM has successfully moulded generations of Mauritians, and, among other things, built up their knowhow and their knowhow-to.

It is true that no country has attained a state of autarky, of economic self-sufficiency. Still, Mauritians will continue to see the UoM as an “entrepreneurial” University, as the Chancellor of the University and Chairperson of the Court has put it, and upholding the fundamental value of meritocracy in our society.

In the course of today’s Meeting, a number of issues (have been/ will be) discussed that are pertinent to the sound administration and governance of the University.

In my capacity as Minister responsible for Tertiary Education, though, I deem it important to highlight some important policy measures that could serve as signposts for future action.

In the very first place, I think we can all be reassured that, the appeal of University degrees for our youth will continue for quite some time to come.

The reasons are numerous.

The high social demand for education in Mauritius is proverbial.

There is also a strong correlation between high tertiary enrolment and the subsequent high income and productivity, itself impacting upon the GDP.

And now, we must also factor in the reforms in the secondary sub-sector. We are aiming at universal and successful completion of secondary education – and the quest for higher education qualifications will remain one of the favoured options for many of our secondary school graduates.

However, in this environment of increasing demand, there is a new reality that our public Tertiary Education Institutions have to come to terms with.

The Tertiary Education landscape is today getting enriched by private providers of high calibre-the competition for learners and for teaching resources is accordingly called upon to grow tougher by the day.

Our public TEIs will have to be resilient, avant-gardist and innovative.

**In parenthesis**, let me add that our public TEIs must also boost up their public image for that is a major puller. They must also demonstrate the capacity to promote team spirit for this is also what we are asking of our learners isn't it.

Contestation and debate are laudable indeed but these should be conducted in house, the public square is never the best place for these to take place.

I have said it before-and I think it's worth repeating: our public TEIs can no more afford to work in isolation and in an uncoordinated manner. Cooperation and complementarity in programmatic approaches are called for and not competition by repeating the same courses at all public universities.

As importantly, the public institutions have to focus on areas that they are good at, concentrate on fields in which they have developed their professed expertise.

Thus, I see the UoM gradually placing more and more emphasis on Master's and Doctoral programs than an undergrad programs.

The objective is to develop vertically, and in depth, instead of laterally.

**Chancellor, Ladies and gentlemen,**

Another domain I wish to highlight is the positioning of Mauritius as a Knowledge Hub.

We have everything going our way to become a favoured HE destination in this part of the world. Our multilingualism, our cultural and historical links with other countries, our security and political stability, the 2<sup>nd</sup> cleanest air quality in the world, all play in our favour.

But perhaps the biggest strength lies in the Increasing demand for higher education in Africa.

Consider India with its 300 million middle class citizens, many of whom are looking for opportunities to study in places where the cost of studies is affordable, coupled with a destination which is not too alien to their own culture.

As for Africa, opportunities exist that must be availed of timeously and expeditiously.

The context is pellucid: Africa's current Gross Enrolment Ratio in tertiary education is 9 per cent. The world average of 33%. This is seen as a severe constraint to Africa's planned Renaissance. The challenge for Africa is hence to turn its demographic growth and youth bulge into a real economic potential with a positive impact on development across the continent - and *that* it can only do so through tertiary education.

In fact, Tertiary Education is seen as a game changer, as a catalyst for an accelerated and sustained economic growth.

In the course of several meetings I have had with African Ministers of Education,

there has been an earnest expression of interest to send their students for higher studies in Mauritius.

We are already offering 50 scholarships to African students-- there may be some problems as far as minimum entry requirements are concerned. Still, there are countries that offer high school Diplomas that are equivalent to our A levels.

But the bottom line is this: **Internationalisation** means, among other things, that we have to establish high quality standards for our

programmes both in terms of relevance and delivery. And the relevance should be for the local set as well as for the regional and global ones.

The benefits for our HE sector will be enormous: apart from the generation of revenue, some of the best students and staff will be attracted and high quality research uptake will be given a fillip.

You will all agree that, in this debate between **internationalism** and **isolationism**, the stand of our public TEIs should be self-evident.

**Two final elements and I will be done, Mr Chairman.**

One relates to **MOUs** signed between the University and other tertiary institutions overseas.

I should think that such MOUs should establish linkages with primarily Brand Universities internationally. The possibilities of the co-awarding of programmes could then be strongly envisaged.

The second element relates to the **Ranking** of our premier public University.

During a recent meeting held in Rwanda earlier this month to discuss the state of tertiary education across Africa, participants from universities across Africa, from Ministries of Education, and other development partners came up with what is now called the **Kigali Initiative**.

This Initiative has identified 7 Steps towards Quality Tertiary Education in Africa. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Step makes a call for African Universities to “AIM HIGHER”. Thus, the target set is to have at least 25 African Universities figuring within the top 300 Universities worldwide by 2030. This would be based on international rankings and evaluations, yes, but taking on board criteria that would be relevant to the African context.

In this context, our challenge is for Mauritius to work towards getting at least one of our Public TEIs ranked among the top 300 universities worldwide. For the first time this year, the Ministry, through the TEC, has an additional Research Fund of MUR 50M, and this can but help improve the ranking of our Universities. I hope the University of Mauritius will make it on that list.

This shouldn't be an impossible task if we really put our collective shoulders to the wheel.

As Jean-Luc Picard, in the Star Trek series, put it, "*Things are only impossible until they're not.*"

***I thank you all for your kind attention.***