

**OPENING OF THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON  
DRUG TRAFFICKING AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN THE  
WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN**

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**SPEECH BY HON PRAVIND KUMAR JUGNAUTH  
PRIME MINISTER**

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**THURSDAY 25 APRIL 2024 AT 0915 HRS**

**VENUE: INTERCONTINENTAL MAURITIUS RESORT,  
BALACLAVA**

**Ministers from participating countries,**

**Colleague Ministers,**

**Members of the Diplomatic Corps,**

**Dr Justice Tettey, Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations,**

**Mr Vêlayoudom Marimoutou, Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission,**

**Dear Delegates,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**A very warm greeting to all of you.**

It is a pleasure to have Ministers and delegates of so many countries coming together for this First Ministerial Conference on Drug Trafficking and Substance Abuse in the Western Indian Ocean.

Mauritius is hosting this conference because we are convinced that the drug scourge, one of the most complex problems of our time, can be more effectively addressed only when we pull together our efforts regionally and internationally to foster better cooperation and act collectively.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The African region faces serious and multifaceted challenges arising from illegal drug distribution and use. From being for many years only an established transit corridor which has witnessed large-scale inter-continental drug flows, the region has now also become a drug destination point with more and more people entangled in the vicious circle of drug consumption. Today, even our minors are not spared by drug dealers.

It has been said time and again that drug trafficking and drug use not only endanger the health and life of individuals, but they also destroy families and threaten the tranquility, stability, and security of society and ultimately hinders the progress and development of a nation.

The stakes are too high for our people and our countries. That is why we are not going to leave our youth in the hands of criminal networks that exploit the weakest and the most deprived!

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The World Drug Report 2023 observed that one in every 13 people aged 15 to 64 worldwide had used a drug in 2021, which is 203% more than in 2011. As such, the estimated number of users increased from 240 million in 2011 to 296 million in 2021.

While the report highlighted that nearly 40 million people worldwide were suffering from drug use disorders in 2021, only 1 in 5 people received treatment, which confirms the high level of inequalities that exist with regard to access to treatment for people suffering from Substance Use Disorder. The report also mentioned that, of the 296 million of people who used drugs in 2020, it was estimated that over 60 million were located in Africa where the prevalence of drugs was higher among the younger population.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This situation calls not only for concerted reflection but active collaboration at different levels, starting right from policymakers to programme implementers.

The drug problem, it is true, affects nations differently, be it in terms of the substances being consumed or the mode of the extent of drug consumption. Similarly, the extent of drug consumption may not be the same everywhere. Some countries are more affected while it can be still an emerging problem in other countries. Even then, we need to be proactive and the drug menace needs to be among one of the top priorities of authorities and governments in this rapidly evolving global landscape. Let us not forget the speed at which the synthetic drug phenomenon has swept across the world.

I seize this opportunity to welcome the initiative of the United States of America for launching the Global Coalition against Synthetic Drugs. The US is working with over 130 interested countries and key international organizations to respond to this major public health challenge. Mauritius is fully committed to the US led initiative and forms part of the coalition.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We cannot afford any complacency and there is need for better preparedness and response. It is often said that drug traffickers are very well organised and always ahead of authorities in many ways to ensure that their horrendous business expand and flourish at the cost of human lives.

We need to move forward methodically with a multi-pronged approach.

Policy makers at the highest level should lead by acting fearlessly. This would give the required impetus to the drug response across the multiple agencies and partners involved in the implementation of drug related interventions.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As you may be aware, here in Mauritius we have engaged ourselves in a relentless war against drug traffickers and their accomplices.

Since 2015, there have been around 24,000 arrests and drugs evaluated at more than Rs 15 billion, have been seized. We have invested massively in logistics and equipment for the Mauritius Police Force while increasing and training its crack-down specialized personnel. We have implemented most of the recommendations of a Commission of Inquiry that Government set

up to probe into the intricacies of the drug trade. Personally, I have committed myself to do whatever is required to put at bay the drug traffickers.

I seize this opportunity to make it clear, once again, that those merchants of death, whoever they are and wherever they are hiding, will be tracked resolutely and fearlessly and brought to justice.

We have set up a High-level Drugs and HIV Council which I personally chair to oversee the national response to the drug menace. This Council comprises the UN Resident Coordinator for Mauritius, several Ministers, officials of Ministries and departments, representatives of NGOs, as well as the private sector, amongst others, to ensure a concerted response.

Moreover, we have a clear and comprehensive plan of action with time bound targets set for the various stakeholders responsible for interventions at ground level. This plan of action encompasses law enforcement to disrupt the drug supply chain; health and social services to reduce demand of drugs through prevention; and treatment and rehabilitation programs.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Mauritius is the first country in sub Saharan Africa to have started a Methadone substitution therapy programme for people injecting drugs. With a view to facilitating access to drug related services for people who use drugs, an Addiction Unit has been set up in each of the five Regional Hospitals of the island. Moreover, dedicated drug related services have been put in place for minors and adolescents as well as for women.

We have acknowledged that drug addiction is a disease and people affected by drug addiction are suffering from a medical disorder requiring treatment, care and support. People who use drugs are directed to a Drug Users Administrative Panel to follow an appropriate treatment and rehabilitation programme rather than being referred directly to the criminal justice system.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to highlight that as the National Drug Control Master Plan was nearing conclusion in 2023, Government sought the collaboration of the UN agencies to have an independent evaluation of the progress achieved and the new challenges faced to serve as basis for the next plan of action.



The objective was to come up with an evidence-based and effective strategic response to the drug threat in Mauritius.

The evaluation exercise was considered as a best practice in terms of commitment and transparency by the independent evaluation section of the United Nations as well as by the UNODC which organized a side event at the 67<sup>th</sup> Commission on Narcotic Drugs which was held in Vienna between 14 and 22 March 2024 to showcase this best practice initiated in Mauritius.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I sincerely hope that our deliberations will help in finalising a regional drug strategy, establishing a regional network of national focal persons and setting up of a Regional drug observatory.

I stand before you today more than ever determined to relentlessly pursue the fight against drug abuse and illicit trafficking.

As competent partners through this inter-ministerial coordination, let us implement common strategies, exchange necessary information and take advantage of the means available to each of us to come up with impactful and innovative initiatives in the Western Indian Ocean region. Each state must today totally commit itself in the battle against criminal organizations

which know no borders, nor limits whether moral or technological. Let us embark on a fierce and effective fight against those who feed on the weakness and dependence of others. Together, we can ensure that all people can live in good health, dignity, peace, security and prosperity.

On this note, it is my pleasure to declare this Conference open.

I thank you for your attention.

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