

**FIRST INTER-MINISTERIAL MEETING (VIRTUAL)
OF THE INDENTURED LABOUR ROUTE PROJECT**

FRIDAY 16 JULY 2021

**PRE-RECORDED STATEMENT
BY HON PRAVIND KUMAR JUGNAUTH, PRIME MINISTER**

**The Honourable Minister of Arts and Cultural Heritage of the Republic of
Mauritius,**

Excellencies,

Director of UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa,

President and Members of the International Scientific Committee,

Representatives of National Archives,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome all Ministers taking part in this meeting that marks the achievement of an important project.

The Indentured Labour Route project was initiated in May 2001 when the idea of establishing a route among countries that have experienced indenture, came into form.

The aim of the Project is to bring together countries that have experienced the migration of indenture labour in the 19th and mid-20th centuries. The idea was discussed at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute seminar on the 'Coolie Route', and a project entitled '*Coolie Route-Crossing the Seven Seas*' was presented.

The concept was given new impetus when the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund was created soon afterwards in 2001. The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund is an institution devoted solely to the preservation of indentured history and heritage. As from January 2004, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund was engaged in setting up the Indentured Labour Route Project.

Since then, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund has focused on research on the international expansion of indenture after the experimentation undertaken in Mauritius was replicated by colonial powers throughout the world. The significance of indenture in Mauritius was further emphasized when the

Aapravasi Ghat, the former immigration depot where indentured labourers arrived, was listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2006.

Research was pursued in a global perspective and led to the organization of two international conferences in 2011 and 2014. It was then decided to set up an Indentured Labour Route Project to better appreciate the nature and significance of indenture in the world.

Today, there is a need for the indentured experience in various countries to be better known across the world. As a country that has witnessed the largest migration of indentured labourers in the 19th century and having the largest proportion of descendants of indentured labourers, Mauritius is ideally suited to take the lead in creating this Route. This is why, in October 2014, the project was presented to UNESCO by Mauritius.

Following the decision of the Executive Board of UNESCO at its 195th session, the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund hosted the secretariat for the Indentured Labour Route project.

The objective of the Project is to establish a network of persons and institutions who will disseminate knowledge about the indentured system as well as the history and culture of its descendants. That Route will strive to contribute to nation building efforts and to a greater understanding among peoples and

societies across the indentured diaspora as well as within the countries themselves.

Numerous countries have received indentured labourers. Two million Indians were transported to islands in the Pacific, the Caribbean, and countries of the Indian Ocean such as Mauritius and Reunion Island.

In 2017, Mauritius embarked on the establishment of an International Scientific Committee with a view to optimizing exchanges among countries and respecting a balanced representation of all regions of the world.

Since then, several professionals in fields such as history, anthropology, archaeology and heritage, have joined the International Scientific Committee to research and promote indenture.

The Committee comprises 20 members from 14 countries namely:

- Australia, Canada, Fiji, Guadeloupe, Guyana, India, Malaysia, Mauritius, New Zealand, Reunion, Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa, Suriname, and USA.
- The International Scientific Committee also includes a representative from UNESCO.

The International Scientific Committee has developed an Action Plan for period 2021 to 2023 so as to promote and raise awareness about the history of indenture. This is particularly important as Indentured labour is under-researched and hardly known as part of colonial history.

The Inter-Ministerial Committee aims to foster research on indenture and disseminate information on indentured labour as an international phenomenon. The objective is also to set up and conduct collaborative programmes that will promote the history of indentured labour worldwide and create a synergy with the Slave Route Project.

15 years ago, on 16 July 2006, the Aapravasi Ghat was inscribed on the World Heritage list. Today, it stands as the international symbol of indentured migration.

In this respect, we are particularly proud to hold this inter-ministerial meeting and hope for fruitful deliberations and increased collaboration among countries so as to raise awareness on indenture and its impact throughout the world.

Thank you.
