

Speech of the Honourable Minister

I have the honour and privilege to officially launch the validation workshop today on the National Strategy and Action Plan on Disability which charts out the way forward for an ambitious disability policy and programme for the period 2015 to 2020.

It is common knowledge that no meaningful progress can be achieved nor development can be promoted if there is no plan of action setting out goals, objectives, policies, programmes, indicators and monitoring mechanisms. I am satisfied that this document makes provision for all the above and that its implementation will help to enhance the disability sector and bring about transformational change in the lives of persons with disabilities. We need to adopt a holistic approach that will lead to a bold leap forward.

This has become necessary because both at local and international levels, things have not remained static. There is a new paradigm. In Mauritius, there is a new Government which has a new approach and a new vision geared towards upliftment of the downtrodden, empowerment of the most vulnerable and equalization of opportunities for the creation of a fairer society. In fact Government Programme 2015 – 2019 clearly stipulates that, I quote:

“a key consideration of Government during its mandate will be to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, promote social justice, economic empowerment and national unity, and protect the elderly and vulnerable ones”. (Unquote)

Our Government walks the talk. That is why its first powerful measure was to substantially increase the Basic Retirement Pension and the Basic Invalidity Pension to Rs. 5,000 monthly despite budgetary implications. It is therefore not a surprise that the budget for social benefits

surged from Rs 14.7 billion in 2014 to reach the whopping figure of Rs 27.5 billion for the period January 2015 to June 2016. This is in itself as a testimony to the importance that this government attaches to the upliftment of the lower sections of the population.

On the international front, Mauritius is a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In August, I led a delegation to Geneva to present the “bilan” of our country in the field of disability. I must state that Mauritius has been lauded for a number of its initiatives relating to social protection of persons with disabilities, promotion of their rights and setting up of monitoring mechanisms.

But attention has also been drawn on the need to remove the reservations on the Convention, the necessity for inclusion of persons with disabilities at all levels in all sectors, the importance of adopting a social model of disability and the need to change and amend several laws which are not in consonance with the provisions of CRPD.

I would like to announce that the Government will set up a Steering Committee comprising different stakeholders that include NGOs and DPOs to look into the timely implementation of the various recommendations made by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Another important development at the international level is the High-Level Summit on Post-2015 Development Agenda which has taken place only a few days ago in New York and was attended by our Prime Minister Sir Anerood Jugnauth. This Summit came forward with 17 Sustainable Development Goals to replace the Millennium Development Goals which did not include disability explicitly among its objectives. It is important that development becomes

disability inclusive and that persons with disabilities are taken on board in the design and implementation of programmes and policies.

As a result, it is gratifying to note that in the introductory document relating to the Sustainable Development Goals, it is clearly stipulated that, I quote:

“People who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the Agenda include all children, youth, persons with disabilities (of whom more than 80% live in the poverty), older persons, etc”. (Unquote)

Furthermore, 5 of the sustainable Development Goals speak about inclusion and inclusive societies with regards to economic growth, education, access to justice and infrastructure.

With the UN Convention and the Sustainable Development Goals in the backdrop, we are moving forward with innovative schemes, projects and policies. Our Disability Bill is intended to overhaul the existing law relating to the rights of persons with disabilities. It will reinforce the human rights of persons with disabilities and protect them against abuse and violence, empower them economically and enhance access to all facilities and amenities with a view to promoting their welfare. I want to reassure that all our stakeholders will be consulted before its finalization.

We are also proposing to amend Sections 3 and 16 of the Constitution. This will serve to proscribe discrimination against persons with disabilities at all levels and help to create a more just and modern inclusive society.

We are also aiming to set up a one-stop-shop that will render services to persons with disabilities more disability-friendly and more customer-oriented. Our objective is to eliminate red-tapism, complacency and delay in the delivery of services. There is a need to unclog the system. We should be at the service of the people.

My Ministry is adopting a “with you for you” approach. We need your proposals and your ideas which we value highly. I have to emphasize that this validation workshop has not been organized just as a matter of formality. We earnestly intend to incorporate your inputs in the finalization of the National Strategy and Action Plan on Disability 2015-2020. In this regard, I have ascertained that a copy of the document be provided to you beforehand to enable you to have the opportunity to examine same and to provide your input.

I now have the pleasure to declare the workshop open.