Ladies & Gentlemen, a very good afternoon to all of you… I’m sure this working session must have been a rich experience for all of you, sharing your concern, your views, your vision towards a more peaceful society… Irrespective of who we are, where we are or where we come from, this is what we all want for our families and our society, PEACE…

I wish to express my warmest thanks to Mrs Susan Coles, the Australian High Commissioner for her unflinching support in helping the Republic of Mauritius fight gender based violence. We highly appreciated her presence when the Protection against Domestic Violence Act 2016 was being presented at the National Assembly, in June this year.
I extend my thanks to Mrs Tina Westra, from the Federal Police, for her initiatives in promoting women empowerment. We need to leapfrog to meet the SDGs of achieving Gender Equality and one of your initiatives ‘Women in Uniform’ is indeed a laudable step forward.

It is somehow unbelievable how domestic violence has taken pandemic proportions, not only in Mauritius. Its impacts on victims, their families, on children, on the working environment, on the communities and on the country … are simply devastating.

If we take a look at fresh figures, cases of domestic violence reported at our Family Support Bureaux of my Ministry, from January to June this years, a total number of 1175 cases have been reported, 123 males and 1052 female victims. At the Police Family Protection Unit, for the same period January to June 2016, a total of 3776 cases have been reported, among which 578 male and 3178 female victims.
We all know that violence against others, is first and foremost, the violation of the rights and fundamental freedom of the victims. Studies conducted on all five continents suggest that no society can consider itself immune from such violence, which transcends social, cultural, ethnic and religious boundaries. Unfortunately, violent behavioral patterns are starting very early, for instance serious bullying incidents at school, as reported in the media but also deplored by parents and teachers. Such patterns translate a need for dominance and power, which unfortunately ends up into gender based violence or other forms of violence within the family cell. What used to be routine couple fights, which bring spice to married life, have turned into atrocious crimes. Some shocking cases have shaken the whole population these last months.

I would like to share a heartbreaking experience with you. I went to visit the family of a victim. Despite several incidents, she went back to her husband. Like most of the victims, she wanted her couple to survive, her child to grow up with both parents, she wanted everybody’s happiness, so she came back to her perpetrator. She was
finally killed, cut into pieces then left to burn in the woods, near the family’s house. The victim’s mother, whom I met a few days after her daughter’s body was found, told me how she was looking at the smoke, unaware that it was her daughter’s body burning…

Ladies & Gentlemen, we have all seen the government’s determination to combat domestic violence which was set high on its agenda… The National Coalition against domestic violence, which was set up under the Prime Minister’s Office, came up with a whole set of recommendations to fight domestic violence, through a multi-agency approach.

In parallel with the strengthening of the legislative framework, the Government is working towards the strengthening of the institutional framework. Provisions have been made in the Budget 2016-2017 to set up of a command centre for domestic violence and it will also act as a one stop department for all issues pertaining to domestic violence including support to all members of
family. Moreover, with the collaboration of NGOs, we are also attempting to provide for additional shelters for women victims of domestic violence.

The new law, which is in force since yesterday 1 Sept, will definitely prove to be a deterrent but this precious piece of legislation is only the beginning. As you are well aware, our cultural heritage and socialization process has captured women into specific stereotypes and roles, which make it difficult for victims to withdraw, even at the expense of their safety. Mentality is a huge barrier to progress. Surprisingly, educated women, professionals, today in 2016, still believe they will only leave their married home after their death, and not before, whatever it pays...

A long and sustained awareness campaign is crucial to bring changes in mentality. It will take years, maybe decades but we have already set the ball rolling… We shall be concentrating our efforts in campaigning through
various spheres, including religious leaders, who HAVE to become our partners to fight this social evil…

We have already started our grassroot campaign, through the women centres of my Ministry, to sensitize women on the consequences of dv and the need to find solutions before it’s too late.

This working session will certainly give a fresh outlook and bring forward further solutions to reach our goal. On behalf of the Republic of Mauritius, I thank you all for your efforts, for your determination and your commitment to join hands with us to save men, women and children…

Thanking you