• My Colleagues Ministers

• MPs

• Mr Troy Fitrell, Chargé d’Affaires, Embassy of the United State of America

• High Commissioners

• Members of Diplomatic Corps

• District and Municipal Councilors

• Ms How Fok Cheung, Permanent Secretary of my Ministry

• Mr Campbell, U.S Embassy Political Officer

• Representatives of US Embassy

• Ladies and gentlemen
It is with deep pride and pleasure that I address you today, on the occasion of the launching of this training programme for the political empowerment of women.

This initiative is another concrete step that the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare is taking, in line with one of the measures of the Programme Based Budgeting as announced in November 2011.

Indeed, by the end of 2012, my Ministry is expected to have helped in the training of 300 women in the field of politics.
To date, through instances such as the National Women Council and different women associations regrouped under its aegis, we have assisted various NGOs, including Gender Links and WIN, in promoting awareness and providing training to women who aspire to join active politics.

Today some 200 participants, including 23 trainers from Mauritius and Rodrigues, will benefit from the courses dispensed jointly by the staff of the US Embassy and my Ministry. Each trainer has pledged to train at least 10 women in political campaigning by the end of the year.
If we add that figure to the number of participants here this morning, I can confidently say that we have achieved, even exceeded, Government’s target.

I must here sincerely thank the US Embassy for its collaboration in this two-day programme that I will be launching in a few minutes.

I am grateful for their assistance in putting together this training session. It augurs well for the process of continuous training of women who wish to join the competitive world of politics.
We are living in an era where the whole world is urging for greater inclusion of women at all levels of decision-making for the transformation of society into a gender-responsive one.

Mauritius is presently undergoing dynamic and transformational phases, all aimed at ensuring enhanced participation of women in society.

Politics being one of the major instances of decision-making, the participation of women therein is highly strategic.
However, the stark reality is that political and economic life within our society is still largely dominated by men.

Furthermore, there has been a worrying decline in the percentage of women in parliament: from 17.1 in 2005, it dropped to 16.6 following the 2010 elections. At local government level, only 5.9 percent of our councilors are women.

This is a paradoxical situation, especially when we know that women represent more than 50% of our population and that at the lower rung of most political parties, women constitute a large chunk of activists.
Ladies, it is time to uplift our ambitions.

This Government is committed to push forward the women agenda. We have constantly endeavored to align ourselves to norms advocated by international instances, such as the Indian Ocean Commission, SADC, and Millennium Development Goals (MDG), for the empowerment of women.

Under the able guidance of our Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Government is actively working towards greater inclusion of our womenfolk in shaping the future of our country.
This will is also translated through several laws which have been enacted recently. The Constitution of Mauritius has been amended to provide for non-discrimination based on sex; the New Local Government Act of 2011, a landmark legislation, through its gender-neutral provision, opens the door for at least 30 per cent of women to stand as candidates for elections in local councils.

This is an unprecedented opportunity for Mauritian women and one which you must seize in order to make your voices heard at the highest level.

As Minister of Gender Equality, I am deeply committed to this cause.
I also pay tribute to my predecessor at the Ministry, Honorable Mrs Sheila Bappoo, present Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reforms Institutions, who is in our midst today. She is, I believe one of the longest-lasting women in active politics. She is a relentless advocate for women’s issues and has proved her commitment during her decades of involvement in politics.

She is an example all of us, newly-hatched women politicians are trying to emulate.
For, there is one thing that we should all agree upon. Women’s Rights are Human Rights. It is when women voice out their concerns, that those concerns can be addressed. And today, for all the women present here, who intend to embark on a political career, I would to say:

“Be Bold. Be not afraid to forge your way amidst deeply entrenched prejudices impeding the progress of women. Believe in yourselves. Be assertive, not arrogant. Focus on your goals and ideals.”
In this way you will be able to make a difference and contribute positively towards building a more equitable nation.”

In setting up this training, we have ensured a two-pronged approach.

The program has been firstly, designed to empower women who wish to become trainers. In turn, they will train other women to enter the field of politics.

Secondly, it is also addressed to women who want to join active politics and who wish to be equipped with the basic
tools and knowledge which will allow them to fend their way in this highly competitive field.

In a bid to include a maximum of persons in this training program, we have opened the offer through public advertisement and also invited all political parties registered during the last legislative elections in 2010 to send would-be trainers to attend this particular course. Some have, some haven’t. I leave it to their conscience.

There will probably be people who will question the necessity to train women in politics, when men are readily accepted without being questioned on their capacity or aptitude.
The rationale behind this endeavor is to empower women to overcome all their socially-constructed inhibitions and encourage them to venture into a predominantly male domain, defying patriarchal norms which clamp down on their progress.

Hence, it is expected that this Political Campaign Training for Women in Mauritius will contribute significantly in encouraging women candidates to effectively contest at forthcoming local elections. The aim is to bridge the gap and kindle a societal transformation that is just and gender-fair.
In a rapidly evolving world, helping women overcome barriers and maximize existing opportunities, is an imperative.

We are aiming at creating a society where sex, gender and class are not the characteristics upon which the quality of an individual would be assessed. Rather, women and men would be judged upon their intrinsic capacity, talent and ambition to construct the future of our Republic; where equal opportunity to succeed in a chosen career path, is available to all, irrespective of sex.

I hope that you will find this course useful and practical when you go on field. The tool kit has been designed so
that you can adapt the different techniques to various realities which you may encounter in your endeavor to get elected.

I hope that for coming elections, more women stand as candidates so that we are able to make a difference.

Our Republic can only benefit from such a momentum.

The time has come to generate new structures based on gender equality. These structures will be key engines to challenge and positively modify the established gender order for more equity and social justice.
I thank you for your attention and now have the pleasure to declare this Political Campaign Training for Women in Mauritius, organized in collaboration with the US Embassy, open.