My colleague Ministers:

Members of the National Assembly;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Mrs Nathoo, Acting Permanent Secretary of my Ministry

Officers of my Ministry

Members of the Press

Dear Guests and participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very proud to welcome you today for the very first Assises de la Famille organised at national level.

Such an exercise forms part of my Ministry’s strategy development for post 2015. It is in
conformity with our national vision to strengthen ties within our Mauritian families and in line with the International Agenda on the Family.

- 2014 marks the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

- Around the world, governments are reviewing their familial policies and strategies.

- I, myself, participated recently at the Doha International Conference, which focused on the empowerment of families as a pathway to development.
The resulting **Doha Call of Action** enhances the necessity to develop comprehensive and coherent policies; integrate cross sectorial approaches to support family stability and strengthen national mechanisms to develop family-oriented policies and programmes.

It also makes a case for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women as well as legislative reforms to improve the protection of families.

The promotion of active fatherhood and shared parental responsibilities; the targeting of poverty alleviation strategies; the prevention of family breakdown through measures to
ensure work-family balance; the recognition of family values and consolidation of inter-generational solidarity.

- The importance of collecting data and statistics on family wellbeing and the collaboration of all stakeholders to disseminate good family practices have also been highlighted. All these issues are pertinent to our Nation’s concern, as we reach the post 2015 threshold.

- Indeed, our 2006 National Policy Paper on the Family, the 2009 National Action Plan on the Family, the 2010 National Programme on Strengthening Values for family life as well as
the 2011 Costed National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence, elaborated by my Ministry, need to be re-engineered if we want to develop a roadmap for the years to come.

• The present and future of our Mauritian families is of concern to us all. Each individual at some point of his or her life, is or has been, part of a family. Family is different for different people at different times. It is not a static phenomenon.

• Over the years, Mauritius has witnessed an evolution from the traditional model of the family to other models of families; family is
modifying its shape and form across cultures and changing times.

- Rapid economic development, over the last few decades, has brought profound changes in our local societal and family structures.

Nowadays, the major challenges faced by Mauritian families include:

- Erosion of values;
- Inter-Generation Gap;
- Divorce;
- Separation;
- Ageing of the Population and
- Poverty
• This is why it is useful, when devising strategies, that we examine the family through multiple lenses.

• There is need to consider the role of each member, specially men and women as parents, and their children of different age groups; the socio economic impact on family structures; how to balance work and familial responsibilities; and the influence of inter-generational ties both on the young and the old.

• The majority of studies on the family, all point out that the family as a unit has a strategic role in the development of a Nation.
• The question I put to you is whether families should be considered as constitutive of development or whether they should be agents of development?

• Meaning whether it should be families and their concerns that drive policy-making or whether they should follow along the lines of strategies that have been devised for them by policy-makers?

• My understanding is that it is a little bit of both. However, it will be for you to discuss in the sessions that you will have during these three days.
• It is interesting and useful to have a fresh look at our Mauritian context, in order to be able to examine the extent and dynamism within which our familial environment is evolving.

• However, it is fundamental that we recognise that Family is the foundation of our society.

• This certainty can constitute the baseline from which policy-makers propose strategies and programmes for the consolidation of the family as an institution.

• In our modern era, phenomenon such as the ageing of family members, necessitate the development of appropriate programmes to
create inter-generational dialogue within the family.

• Today, more and more individuals tend to live longer and healthier. This parameter calls for a paradigm shift in the ways and means that are devised to stimulate the life-cycle of mutual inter-generational participation in our society.

• The ageing of our population should not be considered as a social burden. We should not forget that the current demographical situation is the result of our own doing.
• Indeed, population ageing is man-made. We have, in fact, worked very hard to achieve this, namely through the provisions of our Welfare State.

• There is also the fact that couples get married at a later stage and have children at a more mature age.

• In addition, the older generations have an increased lifespan and are able to participate actively, for a longer period, in their family’s life.

• As such, we can fairly say that older families are becoming increasingly active. The experience and network of older people are
also to be highly valued and should not be neglected.

- It therefore sensible to include the study of this particular aspect in the discussions that are going to be held during “Les Assises de la Famille”.

- Families are the backbone of any society. They are under tremendous pressure nowadays to maintain their traditional structure.

- Whatever be their form, nuclear or extended, families matter. Older families matter as well.
• The older family members have a high potential of knowledge-sharing. Their capacity to become repository of values, enhances their possibility to nurture positive relationship with the young. This is why it is useful, in order to create a win-win situation, to be able to examine inter-generation ties with an inter-generational lens.

• Maintaining family ties through generations is crucial given the globally changing demographic profile. Statistics say that there are over six hundred millions people worldwide aged 60 and over and that by 2050, this group will be 2 billion!
• Mauritius, as all nations, is concerned with the future of its people. The welfare of families ranks high on the agenda of my Ministry and of Government.

• We adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights purporting that “family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, entitled to protection by society and the State”.

• We also agree with the Sanya Declaration 2004, stating that “Public policies should promote conditions that enable families to support individual members of the family to
fulfil their aspirations and contribute to the development of their societies.”

- The phenomenon of lone-parenthood, resulting from the demise of one partner, divorce or severance of cohabitation between adults as well as other family disorders, such as domestic violence, impact on the lives of the family members. Notwithstanding the economic cost of such problems, these precarious family cells are statistically more prone to poverty.

- Such problems also have a gendered-consequence. For example, it is generally acknowledged that single-headed families
have a higher risk to be poor and that divorced women with children as dependents are more vulnerable if uneducated. Also, unmarried couples with children, who at a later stage terminate their cohabitation, enjoy less legal protection.

• Our traditional family model is very much based on a legal system. Legally married couples benefit from various protective measures. It is not so for the less conventional models who find themselves vulnerable when problems crop up.

• That is why we need to consider the gendered consequences of family disorders and modify
our outlook on marriage as a moral and legal-based institution.

• It is only on this condition, that we will be able to develop appropriate programmes and strategies to ensure a wider protection inclusive of various family types.

• In our endeavour to improve the lives of family members for a stronger and more stable society, there is not only need to ponder on the vulnerabilities and fragility of the family structure - which is what most researches tend to do - but also to focus on the security and strength which family structures can provide.
• In other words, how to maximise the positive aspects while addressing the less positive traits of the family.

• Throughout the years, we have witnessed the emergence of smaller family cells. Nowadays, women and men work and contribute jointly to the economic welfare of their family. Gender roles also have evolved.

• For instance, we have been witnessing an increasing role of male parenting.

• However, the assumptions that women are the better child carers; and that men are
indispensable at work and as such, should be the main income provider of the family, still prevail.

- Here again this is a concept that needs to be reviewed. Research-backed evidence underscores that a father’s poor parenting skills, like a mother’s, have a strong negative impact on children. An absent father or one who does not devote enough time to his children, can be detrimental to the child’s harmonious development.

- Families flourish when men play a more active role in their homes. That is why this Assises de
la Famille will also be discussing the role of men in families.

- Our approach needs to take on board the enhancement of responsible fatherhood and to change macho mindset about parenting. We need to dispassionately assess our local situation and find ways to promote gender equality within the familial structure for a more stable and happy family life.

- Equality is also about giving a voice to the younger members of the family. At all stages of their lives, children must be taken into consideration in all decisions impacting on family life.
• As they grow older, space should be provided for them to express their views and opinions and actively participate in the consolidation of family ties.

• This is particularly relevant in view of guiding our children when questions arise as they undergo psychological and physical transformation.

• Children prioritize family as the most crucial entity during a long span of time. In the collective psyche, children are often pictured as needy. But the youth should not be confined to the receiving end. They are also capable of
contributing qualitatively to the welfare of the other family members.

- The challenge is not only to enhance communication, love and dialogue between a child and its parents. It is also to strengthen the links between the child and its grand-parents, that is shifting the focus from burden to benefit.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Traditional perspectives on families have to be revisited. Family is globally acknowledged as the centre of sustainable development.
• As we are reaching the post 2015 threshold, we are aiming at developing new policies, through discussions with all our stakeholders. Such policies will be elaborated recognising the ability of every generation to contribute to our society’s well-being.

• These policies should be key determinants to promote gender equality which, in turn, will result in a stronger society and sounder economy.

• Protecting our families is a moral obligation if we want to advance our country’s development.
• That is why the exercise which will be undertaken during these three days will rationally examine Family and family roles in the process of development.

• The role of family in our local context, will be assessed, in order to be able to address the emerging and existing issues in an adequate manner.

• Since the creation of the family portfolio within my Ministry in the 1980s, Government has been relentlessly working to consolidate support to families.
Through our programs with men, women youth and children, we aim at maintaining the family as a cornerstone of our society.

However, all the best intentions and the best programmes will not bear fruit, if the stakeholders with greater responsibility, that is the adult family members, do not set the example and are not fully committed to making a success of their own family story.

The challenge is for us, as it is worldwide, is to generate policies that are adaptable to the new issues that our families face.
• Today, I am asking all participants involved in the devising and implementation of policies, programmes, projects and activities for the welfare of families and children, to participate fully in the discussions of these Assises de la Famille.

• Let us brainstorm and come up with proposals which are implementable in the short, medium and long-term.

• The consultant, Mr Kooduruth, will subsequently produce a report and propose strategies as well as recommended actions, following inputs gathered from the different work groups.
Ladies and gentlemen,

- *Les Assises de la famille* is an added testimony of Government’s commitment and will to integrate and mainstream actions aiming at the upholding of families and family values.

- For Family is the pulse of a Nation. It is the fundamental group unit of society as well as the core agent for sustainable, social, economic and cultural development.

- Endeavouring to achieve a stable family and concomitantly, a strong nation demands a collective effort.
• So let us all invest our efforts in making *Les Assises de la Famille* a success so that we can plan ahead for the welfare of our Mauritian families. I now have the pleasure to declare “*Les Assises de la Famille*” open.