Mrs Nathoo, acting Permanent Secretary of my Ministry;
Mrs Bali, Head Gender Unit;
Mrs Bhunjun, Head Family Welfare and Protection Unit;
Participants;
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

At the outset, let me thank all of you for having responded positively to our invitation. As indicated by the MC, this training of trainers programme is on the Gender Concept. It will be imparted to some 50 officers of the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Today’s programme is being held in an effort to consolidate efforts of both Ministries, the ministry of Gender Equality, Child development and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, to inculcate and mainstream gender amongst the youth.
At a time when gender issues are at the forefront of international fora, making gender equality a reality in our Mauritian society through clearly defined strategies can enable us to attain our goals faster. As such, training of potential trainers is, according to me, of particular relevancy.

Gender equality is generally perceived to be a women’s problem. Nothing could be further from the truth. Gender equality is not only a women’s concern, but is the collective responsibility of every individual and the society as a whole. The active participation and contribution of both men and women are therefore required to bring about societal changes aiming at improving the quality of life of both genders.

In a society with a patriarchal structure such as ours, the participation of men in the attainment of gender equality is of paramount importance. It reconciles our international commitments to make Mauritius a gender-fair society with the government’s vision of providing equal life chances and opportunities to one and all.
International commitment to engage men and boys in the promotion of gender equality was the first time affirmed at the International Conference on Population and Development, commonly known as ICPD in 1994.

Since then, in parallel with women’s empowerment, there has been increasing emphasis internationally, in policy and in practice, on engaging men to promote and achieve gender equality.

Beginning with the Beijing Declaration, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, a number of intergovernmental platforms, such as the World Summit on Social Development (1995), its review session (2000), and the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS (2001), have focused on this issue.

The importance of education systems in shaping the gender perspective of boys was underscored in the landmark Dakar Framework for Education for All (UNESCO, 2000).
An explicit goal (goal 5) of the Dakar Framework is to ensure that education systems contribute to and promote gender equality, instead of reinforcing gender stereotypes. In March 2004, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women specifically focused on the theme: The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality.

At regional level, the attention given to the role of men and boys in advocating for gender equality has gained momentum. This has also been flagged out at the 7th Meeting of the Commonwealth Ministers responsible for Women’s Affairs in Fiji in 2004.

Working with men and boys was thereat recognised as a means to achieve significant progress on the gender equality agenda. It also encouraged men to draw on positive aspect of traditional roles such as leadership, courage and strength to advance the cause of women.

Nowadays, there is need to formulate effective and new strategies for change. Men should be encouraged to see their
engagement in gender issues as an action that helps improve human rights for all, as opposed to diminishing male privileges.

There are clear benefits to be derived from the involvement of men and boys in creating a gender-equal society.

This is why this Ministry has deemed it strategic to forge partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. You have a network of Youth Centres across the island, working with youth, including boys, aged between 16-29 years.

We are very much aware that attitudes, behaviours and identities of men and young boys towards women and girls are shaped namely during adolescence as well as the early childhood years.

The young mind is receptive to innovative ideas. It is, therefore, crucial that the people interacting with them are properly equipped with the right knowledge and tools to encourage young people to mainstream gender in society.
We started with a Residential Workshop at Pointe Jerome Youth Centre in Mahebourg in August 2013.

Some 50 Youth leaders coming from various regions of the island participated in the workshop in a bid to enhance their knowledge and acquire basic tools and skills in championing for equality between men and women.

Today’s activity is the build-up of a series that will culminate in November.

During this workshop, you will be familiarised with the gender concept, gender-sensitive attitudes, behaviour and languages in the process of socialization, gender-based violence and the gendered implications of sexual and reproductive health.

Understanding the dynamics of these concepts will shape boys and men’s thinking and behaviour towards women, induce them to be more respectful and treat women with the dignity they deserve.
All these topics are subjects where men have a fundamental role to play. In partaking in this endeavour, men will become advocates of positive societal change and view women’s progress as a force to be encouraged.

I will encourage you to translate the specific provisions of the gender sectoral policy of your ministry, which urge you develop specific programmes to address negative gender stereotypes and raise awareness about substantive discrimination and inequality.

You would remember that the Ministry of Youth and Sports has formulated, in 2009, its sectoral gender policy. Amongst its recommendations, it is stipulated that “all staff of the Ministry, whether at central or outreach levels, consultants and resource persons will undergo gender sensitisation and training…”.

Indeed, once the concept of Gender is understood and officers possess the necessary knowledge to impart to their target audience, misconceptions regarding gender issues will be adequately addressed.
In our programme targeting men and boys, we aim at reaching 1000 youth by the end of this year.

Notwithstanding the programme aims at empowering men and boys in the promotion of gender equality, this Ministry is also working with young girls and women. We may envisage that, at a certain point in time, a dialogue between young women and men to identify underlying barriers that lead to gender inequality.

To conclude, I look forward to the implementation of the plan of work, which I am made to understand will be finalised today during the plenary session. It is my wish that all officers present today, give their full support to this programme.

Thank you for your attention.