Hon Rajesh Jeetah, Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology;

Ms How Fok Cheung, Permanent Secretary of my Ministry;

Mr Koodoruth, Senior Lecturer;

Mrs Chan-Meetoo, Lecturer;

Mrs Bhunjun, Head Family Welfare and Protection Unit of my Ministry;

Dear Students;

All Protocols Observed;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the audience present here today for the launching of the Capacity Building Programme on responsible reporting on gender-based violence issues. This activity falls under the Pillar 4 of our Costed National Action Plan to end Gender-Based Violence and is a major part of our actions in
enlisting the support of all stakeholders in our endeavour to combat GBV.

Gender-based violence is purely and simply a violation of human rights. It has been recognised as a world-wide problem which impacts negatively on the development of any country. Indeed, GBV hampers not only the full development of victims, but it also carries adverse socio-economic consequences that extend beyond the familial environment.

Mauritius has not been spared by this reality. Men also are not immune to this type of violence, even if statistics still reflect that women are the main victims of this scourge.

Violence against women permeates all social strata irrespective of age, sex, income group, culture and religion.

Violence in all its forms, be it sexual, psychological, physical or verbal is highly condemnable.

In the light of general statistics, it is seen that during her lifetime, at least one in every three women will have been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise ill-treated.
The most appalling fact is that such acts will be committed by someone she knows, including a member of her own family, an employer or a co-worker.

If it is to be effectively addressed, actions to combat gender-based violence, must be geared both on preventive and corrective fronts.

For a coordinated action to bring substantial results, networking with every stakeholder, from governmental institutions to civil society, is of primordial importance. If we want to tackle GBV, everyone must play its part.

The media, as one means of mass communication, can help sensitise a wide audience as well as contribute to change mind-sets on the problematics of gender-based violence.

It is therefore logical that, in the National Action Plan to Combat Domestic Violence and subsequently in the National Action Plan to End GBV, the support of the media has been identified as one strategic step to enlarge the scope of action to address this problem.

In trying to enlist the support of journalists in this endeavour, my Ministry in collaboration with organisations such as Gender Links and Gender and Media Southern Africa.
(GEMSA), conducted several capacity building programmes for media people.

However, I am informed that this initiative did not yield the expected response. This is why I am grateful to the University of Mauritius to have partnered with us in order to organise this particular programme.

It targets students who are following courses in Communication and Media Studies and Journalism. You are probably envisaging a career in communication and/or journalism. And at one point in time, you may be confronted to situations where you will be required to report on GBV cases.

The aim of today’s capacity building programme is to empower you so that your coverage of GBV incidences are effected in a responsible and sensitive manner.

So I appeal to you, dear students, to give a particular attention to the manner in which incidents of gender-based violence are portrayed in our local media.

It is of paramount importance to assess the impact that language, choice of vocabulary and gender focus have in the different reports of cases involving acts of violence.
It is also useful to realise that whatever is written has a bearing on the way that the victim is perceived.

For example, focusing on how the victim was dressed, on his or her demeanour at a given time, may lead to reverse criminalisation where the victim ends up being blamed and the perpetrator exonerated from his acts.

Moreover, perpetuation of negative and stereotyped images of women in the media contributes to trivialization of gender-based violence.

In addition, portrayals of specific incidents affect not only the person or persons involved, but also their families and shape the readers’ understanding of a particular situation.

As you can see, there is a lot of responsibility involved in writing an article!

All being said, the media can be a powerful tool in fighting gender-based violence. Because of their transformative capacity, media people can help in shaping public opinion and perceptions and push for positive change.
Their task is even more relevant when we know that despite its pervasiveness, domestic violence remains the least talked about violation of women’s human rights.

Perhaps because this monstrosity occurs mostly behind closed doors and the victims are subjected to emotional distress and family pressure that impedes upon their ability to voice out their misery.

Since the Beijing World Conference on women in 1995, the issue of gender-based violence has gained greater visibility and the media has come a long way in terms of its reporting.

In many regions of the world, gender-based violence is more visible in the press and makes headlines.

By making gender-based violence more visible through the media, the press forces society to acknowledge it as a problem. Sensitive reporting on gender-based violence can also help victims and their families by providing them with the information they need to protect themselves or others as well as seek help and justice.

It is therefore crucial that reporters be introduced to sensitive reporting as opposed to sensational reporting.
Indeed, sensationalising cases of GBV has an adverse effect on the victims and their families.

I hope that this Capacity Building Programme will prove to be useful to all of you who may find yourselves confronted to situations where reporting on a case of GBV will require you to use your discernment in the manner in which the news is to be carried.

At the least, that it impresses upon you your personal responsibility as future reporters and media people as regards gender-based violence reporting.

I now declare the Capacity Building Programme open.

Thank you.