Address by His Excellency

Mr. Rajkeswur Purryag, GCSK, GOSK

President of the Republic of Mauritius

at the Opening of the 11th Regional Meeting

of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly

on Wednesday 12 February 2014 at 11 00 hours

Sir Harilal Vaghjee Memorial Hall

Port Louis
The Hon. Razack Peeroo, Speaker of the National Assembly

Hon Co-chairs of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly

Hon Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General of the ACP

Honourable Members of Parliament

Heads of Regional Organisation

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join the Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly to welcome you all to Mauritius.

Your presence at this 11th Regional Meeting of the ACP-EU Joint Assembly, and the second JPA meeting of the Region of East Africa, bears testimony to the important role of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in promoting democratic processes, and in fostering greater understanding between the EU and the ACP States based on the fundamental principles of equality, participation and dialogue.

The second revised Cotonou Agreement acknowledges that a political environment guaranteeing peace, security, respect for human rights, democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance is an integral part of long-term development and underpins the economic welfare and prosperity of our people.

Indeed, peace and stability and sustainable development are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

In this regard, the ACP-EU partnership recognizes the important role of the ACP national and regional Parliaments.
It is in this context that I would like to extend a special welcome to the Members of the Malagasy delegation.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the people of the sister island of Madagascar for the very able and successful manner in which they organized and participated in the Presidential and Parliamentary elections recently.

Now that Madagascar has returned to constitutional normalcy, it is opportune for all of us to work together in an inclusive and dedicated manner in order to unleash the huge development potentials of the island.

The people of Madagascar deserve this and may rest assured that in their endeavour towards nation building, and institutional and economic development, they can count on our unwavering support.

In this regard, I had a long and positive conversation with the newly elected President of the Republic of Madagascar when I attended his inauguration a couple of weeks ago.

I have re-assured him that Mauritius will extend all possible support in order to enable Madagascar to move out of its level of stagnation.

I noted his strong determination and commitment to move Madagascar forward.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

An important innovation of the Cotonou Agreement is the role that it ascribes to the involvement of national parliaments in the ACP-EU relations including the platform for dialogue provided in Article 8.
As Speaker of the National Assembly, I had the opportunity to participate in such a dialogue that allowed me to keep myself abreast of ACP-EU matters, the more so, as I was actively involved in the negotiations of the Cotonou Agreement in my capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade as well as an ACP Ministerial Spokesperson.

The holding of regular regional meetings of the JPA provides an excellent forum to highlight and discuss the regional dimension of our 4-decade old model of North-South Cooperation.

It also gives us an opportunity to discuss regional issues and specificities as well as the needs of the various regions of the ACP.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This meeting is also a framework for you to be more familiar with the specificities of small islands, their vulnerabilities, the aspirations of their people as well as the measures taken to improve the standards of living and to make your respective country more competitive on the global market.

As you know, our strong partnership is rooted in history.

The benefits accrued under the successive Lomé Conventions and the Cotonou Agreement, have no doubt helped many ACP countries in their efforts towards poverty eradication, sustainable development, and greater integration in the world economy.

It is extremely important that this model of cooperation continues after the expiry of the Cotonou Agreement in 2020.
Inevitably, the post-Cotonou Agreement, while building on the “acquis” has to adapt so as to meet the emerging challenges of this 21st century.

Indeed, we need a new, strong and modern partnership- a real partnership of equals, particularly, with an emerging Africa.

As usual, Mauritius is looking forward to make constructive contribution to the reflection on the future perspectives of the ACP group during the forthcoming Eminent Persons Group consultations scheduled later this year.

Let me also underscore the high appreciation of Mauritius for the support which the Joint Assembly has provided to the ACP Sugar Supplying States in the context of the reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy.

However, we are very concerned with the conclusions of a Study by the Commission published last December.

Its projections inter-alia are that sugar production in the EU will expand significantly and prices will fall.

Such projections mean that only the most competitive producers will be able to survive with a price which is expected to be around 400 euros.

I would therefore, urge the European Parliamentarians and all other institutions concerned to consider reviewing the decision to abolish the sugar quotas.

That is because the restructuring, modernization and transformation of our sugar cane industry has not been completed yet.
Indeed, this important exercise has been delayed by the unprecedented 2007/08 food, fuel and financial crises which were not anticipated when we discussed the Accompanying Measures for the Sugar sector.

Nor did we factor it into the determination of the Accompanying Measures for the ACP Sugar Sector.

We would like Parliamentarians to support a decision to allow the allocation and reallocation of all the resources available in the EU budget for the Accompanying Measures to be fully utilized post-2014.

This will require a political decision.

I understand that under the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament has enhanced power including co-decision on financial matters.

Hence, our plea through the JPA to the European Parliament to look into this important issue with diligence.

The ACP Sugar Protocol countries collectively have the capacity to use the available resources.

And we need those resources to complete our modernization plan so as to make our sugar cane industry viable and profitable.

This is particularly important in view of the multi-functional role that the sugar cane industry plays in our small island developing economy.

Our flexi factories need a secure supply of sugar cane and this can only happen if our small and other planters obtain a fair and remunerative price in order to continue to cultivate sugar cane.
In the same breath, we are also exploring all other avenues to sustain our growth and development plans.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*Mauritius is geared to developing other sectors of its economy, especially, the services sector, ICT, sea food hub as well as the ocean economy.*

All these sectors hold great promise for a small island state like Mauritius that is not endowed with natural resources.

As an island state, our development is also inextricably linked to the sustainable management and use of coastal and marine resources.

In this regard, our ambition is to start a wide array of ocean-related activities.

We are making sure that we act responsibly so that our resources are sustainably exploited and that the long term prosperity of our people is preserved.

We are looking forward to more effective co-operation in areas such as sustainable fisheries management, climate change, food security and ocean science, disaster management, maritime safety and security, and energy security.

Ocean resources cannot be sustainably exploited by small economies without the financial and technological assistance of the international community.

In its endeavour for sustainable development, Mauritius is furthermore, implementing the “Maurice Ile Durable” project which aims at meeting the challenges of climate change, loss of biodiversity and degradation of essential components of the ecosystem and of a heavy dependency on fossil fuels.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Much has been said and written on the Economic Partnership Agreement.

I am happy to note that good progress has recently been made in certain regions, particularly, in West Africa.

This augurs well for the ACP-EU co-operation in such a crucial sector as trade and economic development.

The Economic Partnership Agreement must be instruments to foster sustainable development, to build competitiveness, reinforce regional integration and address supply side as well as trade-related infrastructure constraints.

These are fundamental principles that should guide future negotiations.

Mauritius, along with the Seychelles, Madagascar and Zimbabwe, is implementing the interim EPA and we remain fully committed to concluding a full and comprehensive Agreement.

We also welcome the EU decision to provide an amount of four million euros to meet the priority needs of these four countries, as well as the proposed support to be provided under the 11th EDF for the implementation of the interim EPA.

We need adequate and additional resources on a predictable basis to finance the EPA and related adjustment costs.

In this regard, there is an urgent need to effectively set up the EPA Fund which has already been agreed in the Eastern and Southern Africa - EU Interim Economic Partnership Agreement.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As far as bilateral support from the EU is concerned, Mauritius will suffer a drastic reduction in the National Indicative Programme allocation on account of the application by the EU of the principle of differentiation.

While we are given to understand that we may benefit from thematic funding, loan grant blending and other funds under the Regional Programme, we believe that the specific vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States have not been fully addressed.

Mauritius still requires donor engagement and support to enable it to move to the next stage of its development and address certain current challenges.

Some of the challenges Mauritius is facing are youth and women unemployment, improving education and training systems so as to upgrade the skills and equip our people with the high-skill, high-reward jobs of the future and the pursuance of comprehensive reforms we are undertaking.

No doubt, we have travelled a long way.

But there is still a lot to be done to attain our objective to join the high income category countries.

We have by the dint of our hard work and the sacrifice of our people preserved the foundations of an extensive welfare state by providing inter-alia universal free education, free health services, free transportation for school children and the elderly, social coverage as well as universal pensions.
Inspite of the major economic shocks that Mauritius has faced including a substantial reduction in the price of our sugar, we have also taken steps to further democratize the economy, preserve the rule of law and consolidate the principles of our democratic traditions.

We are equally committed to maintaining peace and security in our region and promote regional integration, particularly, in a globalizing world economy.

We also welcome the progress being made in the EAC-COMESA-SADC tripartite initiative towards the establishment of a single FTA.

Thanks to the financial assistance of the EU, we have set up a mechanism to bring pirates operating in the Indian Ocean to trial.

This is helping to protect international trade and shipping lanes.

We are also working towards greater air and sea connectivity between the islands of the Indian Ocean through our membership of the Indian Ocean Commission, with the hope that in the not too distant future, the islands of the Indian Ocean would be fully connected with each other.

We remain convinced that by working together, we can make an important contribution to foster peace, security, stability and prosperity for the countries and people of the East African region and wider ACP and EU family.

From your agenda, I have noted that you will be discussing a number of critical issues.
In this regard, I have no doubt that your meeting will come up with concrete proposals that will help take forward our cooperation in a spirit of constructive dialogue and mutual respect and understanding.

The JPA indeed provides an ideal forum and I will urge you, as elected representatives, to utilize it in order to promote the legitimate aspirations of our people.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate the firm belief of Dr. Dieter FRISCH, former Director General for Development of the European Commission, that the post Cotonou Agreement will have to mark an advance over the forms of the Lomé/Cotonou systems while at the same time managing to retain and deepen certain well proven elements of the culture and philosophy of the ACP-EU partnership based on the principles of co-operation between sovereign states.

Distinguished Delegates,

For those of you who are visiting our country for the first time, I will urge you to take time away from your busy schedule and to see for yourselves the beauty and natural scenery of Mauritius as well as enjoy the hospitality of our people.

With these words, I wish you all good luck and a fruitful meeting.

I now have the pleasure to declare open this 11\textsuperscript{th} Regional Meeting of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

I thank you for your attention.