Speech by H.E. Mr Rajkeswur Purryag, GCSK, GOSK, President of the Republic of Mauritius, on the occasion of the opening of Africa Training Institute (ATI), held on Thursday 26 June 2014 at 11 00 hours at the Bramer House, Ebene.

Mr. Zhu Min, Deputy Managing Director, International Monetary Fund
Mr Kossi Assimaidou, Executive Director, IMF
Mrs Antoinette Sayeh, Director African Department
Mrs Sharmini Coorey, Director, Institute for Capacity Development of the IMF
Mr Dev Manraj, Financial Secretary, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
Members of the Diplomatic Corps and representatives of Development Partners,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

On behalf of the Government and people of Mauritius and on my personal behalf, I would like to welcome Mr Zhu Min and his delegation to our country on the occasion of the official launching of this Africa Training Institute.

Let me also express my deepest appreciation to the IMF for having selected Mauritius as the venue to host this important international institution.

I understand that Africa was the only Continent without such a high quality training institute.

Mauritius is therefore very pleased to become part of the network of IMF Training Institutes and Programmes, which include Austria, Kuwait, Singapore, Brazil, China, and India.

With the opening of the ATI, IMF is fulfilling its commitment to the request of our Heads of State and Government to strengthen the capacity of African Governments and institutions to design and implement sound macroeconomic policies.

We understand that IMF has already worked out a 5-year programme and the expected outcomes for the next 5 years.

We will give all the support we can to the successful implementation of these programmes.

There is an African saying that “knowledge is like the trunk of a giant tree. An individual’s arm span cannot embrace it. It takes a community of friends to do so.”
It is therefore very much in this spirit that Mauritius has offered to host the ATI.

We have in fact laid the foundation for developing Mauritius as a knowledge centre of excellence for Africa.

In 2010, we established the Regional Multidisciplinary Centre of Excellence to build up capacity in the area of regional integration for Southern and Eastern Africa.

The focus of this institute is to promote peer to peer learning among its member countries.

It is working with global and regional institutions to provide capacity building support through training and advisory services on core regional issues.

In 2011, the Africase South was set up in Mauritius.

This institution is providing technical assistance and training to officials of 13 countries of Southern Africa.

The centre has so far trained 648 government officials, of whom 243 are women.

In addition, thanks to AFRITAC South’s technical assistance programme, its 13 member countries in Southern Africa have now initiated important institutional reforms to promote growth and poverty reduction.

And in 2012, we signed a Letter of Understanding with the IMF for the setting up of the ATI in Mauritius.

It is closely collaborating with the five AFRITACs on the Continent, supporting their technical assistance activities through customized training.

We are very pleased to learn that the number of courses will increase to 10 and more joint ATI/AFRITACs activities are planned in the coming 12 months.

We see the ATI as a pan-African institution that would attract participants from all parts of Africa.

Together, these three institutions can bring hundreds of experts from around the world to train up to 3000 African public sector officials annually.

Mauritius has already committed significant resources towards the establishment of these training organisations.

We have also been the major contributor to the establishment and implementation of capacity building programmes of the ATI and AFRITAC South.

So far, financial contribution has also been made to the ATI by the Australian and Chinese authorities.
More contributions are however, needed to reduce the still wide gap between demand and supply for high quality training.

We trust that more donors, including African countries themselves and other international organizations will support the ATI.

I should like here to stress that we are also promoting the development of greater capacity in the private sector to cater for more foreign students.

In the recent past, there were very few African students enrolled in our universities and other tertiary institutions.

Today, there are some 900 students, and the number is on a rising trend.

But our efforts do not stop here.

Mauritius’ commitment and contribution to development in Africa go beyond the setting up of training institutions.

In fact, we have developed a New Africa Strategy focused on our country partnering with other African nations to boost the new dynamics of growth and development.

The main objectives of that strategy are:

- to open up greater economic space for our entrepreneurs.
- to give a spur to regional economic integration and cooperation
- to promote collective efforts on attracting investment flows into Africa
- and, to make of Mauritius a financial services and business hub to support Rising Africa.

To pursue these objectives:

We have waived visa entry requirements for nationals of almost all African countries.

The Board of Investment has also established the Africa Centre of Excellence to assist in the identification of investment and business opportunities for our own entrepreneurs as well as for foreign investors.

We have furthermore, set up a Mauritius Africa Fund to encourage Mauritian entrepreneurs to invest in Africa.

Likewise, we are expanding our network of diplomatic representations in Africa.

Moreover, we are negotiating with some countries in Africa on a G2G basis for cooperation in areas covering, sugar, textiles, tourism, and seafood production, development and management of special economic zones, and recruitment of health and education personnel.
All these are in addition to our efforts to promote greater cooperation among African Investment Promotion agencies.

In fact, the BOI is currently holding a high level conference bringing together the CEOs of some 30 African Investment Promotion Agencies to share experiences and maximize synergies in business development.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The efforts we are making are focused on a genuine spirit of partnership with a conviction that together we can make significant progress on fighting poverty and lifting the standards of living of our people in the African continent.

Unfortunately, it is with a sense of sadness that we learn that in certain quarters there is a misperception of the role our financial services sector is playing in Africa.

Let me seize this opportunity to reaffirm that Mauritius is not a tax-haven country as supported by OECD and the Commonwealth Secretariat amongst others.

I am sure that Mr Zhu would confirm that the IMF is of the same view.

Moreover, we take pride in our reputation as borne out in our top ranking in Africa by various international independent agencies – in particular, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Fraser Institute, World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index and Moody’s.

We have earned these recognitions by the dint of our hard work, discipline and a perennial focus on good governance.

We have always upheld and adhered to the principles of democracy, values of human rights, rule of law and a strong judicial and legal system.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish the ATI plenty of success in its endeavour and operations and Mr Zhu and his delegation a pleasant stay in Mauritius.

I thank you for your attention