Speech by His Excellency Mr. Rajkeswur Purryag, GCSK, GOSK, President of the Republic, on the occasion of the 20th International Conference of Racing Analysts and Veterinarians, organized by the Mauritius Turf Club, held on Monday 22 September 2014 at 11.15 hours at the Sugar Beach Hotel.

Mr. Louis Romanet, Chairman of the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities

Mr Bertrand Baudot, Chairman of ICRAV Organising Committee

The President and Members of the Association of Official Racing Chemists

The President and Members of the International Group of Specialist Racing Veterinarians

The President and Members of the Mauritius Turf Club,

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning!

I wish to thank Mr Bertrand Baudot, Chairman of the Organising Committee of ICRAV, for associating me with the opening of this 20th International Conference of Racing Analysts and Veterinarians.

ICRAV has a mandate to address scientific, veterinary and welfare issues facing the racing industry.

This Conference, I understand, has as prime objective to disseminate knowledge and ideas vital to maintaining the integrity of racing and the welfare of the horse.

And also to provide scientific support to the world’s racing authorities.

Your Conference therefore comes at a very opportune time, especially against the background of adverse criticisms against the horseracing industry in Mauritius.

I believe therefore that there can be no better way than this Conference to restore the image and credibility of the noble activity that horse racing is.

Mauritius has a long tradition of horse racing.

Indeed, the Mauritius Turf Club which is responsible for the organisation of horseracing was created as far back as 1812, and since then, horseracing has been part and parcel of our history, culture and traditions.
The Mauritius Turf Club is the oldest horse racing club in this part of the world.

Also, it is the third oldest club in the World.

For over 200 years now, horseracing has been among the most important and most popular sporting events organised in Mauritius.

This is clearly evidenced by the regular public turnouts during the horseracing season, particularly, for the main events as well as the International Jockey’s Day.

In Mauritius, people have a big passion for horseracing, not always from a betting point of view, but more importantly, as a noble sport.

But as any other sports, the horseracing industry is, unfortunately, not shielded from illegal activities that have contributed to bring its image into disrepute.

Through the acts and doings of certain unscrupulous people, the image of the industry as a whole has been badly tainted.

For example, the industry has reportedly seen an increase in substances used on horses, essentially to gain a competitive edge.

As we know, the use of substances with the potential to affect equine performance is contrary not only to the equestrian sport but also to the welfare of the horse itself.

There have also been cases of cheating during the race.

As I said, such acts add to portray a bad image of the industry.

The world over, there have been calls for integrity and probity in horseracing.

In Mauritius, there have been public outcries on many occasions in the manner in which, at times, some races are run with the result that there is an increasing demand for more transparency in the organisation of horseracing.

It is important therefore that the perception of transparency is enhanced so as to build trust and confidence among the public.

There is need to return to true horsemanship, to truly fair and natural competition.

On the other hand, the fight against doping and substance abuse should remain the top priority of horseracing authorities.

Likewise, there should be a zero-tolerance policy to combat cheating.
All those responsible for using or abetting the use of doping substances should be dealt with seriously.

I would like to congratulate ICRAV for their excellent and laudable initiative in hosting this high level meeting in Mauritius.

I have seen the topics that are on your agenda.

They are very pertinent.

The speakers are also highly respected professionals in their own respective fields.

I have no doubt that they will provide valuable inputs to help maintain the integrity of horse racing as well as the welfare of the horses.

I wish you all good luck and a fruitful Conference.

With these words, I have the pleasure now to declare this 20th International Conference of Racing Analysts and Veterinarians open.

I thank you for your attention.