Speech by H.E Mr Rajkeswur Purryag, GCSK, GOSK, President of the Republic of Mauritius, on the occasion of the Prize Giving Ceremony of Cosmopolitan College (Girls), held on Friday 20 June 2014 at 09:30 hrs.

Dr. the Hon. Balkissoon Hookoom, Parliamentary Private Secretary
Mr Dayachand Napal, Founder and Manager of the Cosmopolitan College
Mr Thakoorparsad Dooboree, Rector
All the Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff of the College
Dear Parents and Students
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning!

I feel greatly honoured to be in your midst to-day on the occasion of your Prize Giving Ceremony.

I realise that it is now a tradition for many schools to reward their best performing students, particularly, those who have excelled at the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate examinations.

This is no doubt a good initiative to foster excellence in our education system and I welcome it.

Of late, I am being constantly solicited to grace Annual Prize Giving functions organized by educational institutions.

Of the many in which I have already participated, this is the second ceremony that I am attending only this week.

I have one more the following Friday at the Royal College Curepipe.

I always make it a point to accept such invitations.

That is because for me, education is the key to success, not only to the individual but also for society at large.

As President Nelson Mandela said “Education is such a powerful weapon that it can transform the world.”

Education is the only tool that can transform a human being and make him a good citizen.

SSR said that “man has emancipated from the jungle of life through education”.

Ladies and Gentlemen

A famous philosopher once stated and I quote: -
“A human being will never attain his full heights until and unless he is educated.” (Unquote)

To-day, we are at a turning point in our educational journey.

And one of the biggest challenges besetting our country is an ageing population that is also threatening the competitiveness of our economy as well as the sustainability of our comprehensive welfare state.

The question that we should now ask is whether we will be able to maintain or even increase the level of prosperity in this fast changing world.

Will we be able to promote and defend our sustained values and economic interests?

My answer is yes.

We can.

We can be the agent of change by providing a world class education, an education that is imbued with values, and that will enable us to compete in this competitive world.

Countries that have placed a high premium on education, quality education are those that have been able to reap the benefits and opportunities that the global economic environment has unfolded for them.

Our schools have a crucial role to play in our socio-economic development.

From abject poverty, we have moved to the status of a middle-income earning country, thanks to the importance that we attached to educating our people.

There is not an iota of doubt that education is and will remain crucial in order to help us thrive in an increasingly competitive international environment.

Our education system has up to now constituted the building blocks of our growth and development for over four decades now, particularly since Independence.

It has also produced a pool of sufficiently talented and educated people who have been the driving force of our success.

But in this 21st Century our education system will have to respond to the Knowledge society – 21st Century Knowledge Society.

Most of you may not know, and it is fitting that I tell you that our public education system has never been a matter of coincidence.

It has been the result of vision, commitment and hard work, often, in the face of numerous challenges.
So, as you celebrate the performance of your best students, it is imperative that you also pay tribute to the leadership of this country for the vision and wisdom they had for education.

And here, I have in mind, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the Father of the Nation.

Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam always believed that it was through education that we would create the opportunity for our citizens to succeed in life.

It was through education that we would offer our young a pathway out of the circumstances of their birth and open up to them a better life than that of their parents.

Had it not been for the vision of SSR, many of our girls, especially, those living in the rural areas would never have had the chance to secondary education.

To-day, you should consider yourselves lucky that secondary education is free and accessible to every cross-section of our population.

Most of the secondary schools were fee paying and privately owned.

Our parents had to undergo a lot of sacrifice to find the money to pay our school fees.

They worked hard, sometimes engaging in multiple activities, such as animal rearing and domestic duties, to earn enough money to provide a living for us and give us education.

There was no free transportation as you have to-day.

The end of our educational journey in those days were School Certificate, and very rarely, up to the HSC level.

Very few could make it to the tertiary level.

In our days, parents with large families had to choose who to send to school.

And more often than not, boys were preferred.

Girls were the collateral victims.

They were made to stay at home and help with the household duties.

To-day, because of free education, our girls are fully educated and have equal opportunities to compete along with our boys, in every sphere of activities.

In some areas, girls are even doing better than boys.

Our women are more emancipated and many of them are occupying prominent positions, both in the public and private sectors.
And here, let me also pay a special tribute to the private secondary schools for their immense contribution to the development of the cause of education in particular, and our society, in general.

The private secondary schools, especially in the rural areas, have been largely instrumental in transforming the lives and shaping the destinies of many of our children from poor families.

This is a clear indication that it’s not wealth but good education that counts for the success of a child.

In this part of our country, there are many such schools still existing that have left an indelible print in the history of our education system.

At a time when education was considered to be a luxury, available to a privileged few, some of our compatriots like Mr. Dayachand Napal, late Mr. Rameshwar Jaypaul, late Mr. Pokunlall Nilambar, late Mr. Rohit Boolaky, and so many others, took up the challenge, and very often at great risk, to bring education to the doorstep of those who could not afford it.

That’s why I would like to congratulate Mr. Dayachand Napal, Manager and Founder of the Cosmopolitan College for his commitment to the cause of education and his vision in setting up a college entirely dedicated to our children in the region, especially at a time when secondary education was not yet free.

Since its creation in 1963, the Cosmopolitan College has, like other private secondary schools, remained at the forefront of the Education sector in Mauritius, relentless and unabated in its mission to provide education to children from the weaker segments of our population.

*Ladies and Gentlemen*

*Dear Students*

On this auspicious occasion, we should also have a special thought for Mrs. Gnanasegery Napal, the Co-Founder of the Cosmopolitan College, and late wife of Mr. Dayachand Napal.

I am sure during her living, Mrs Napal was a constant source of inspiration and comfort to her husband.

I have been told that Mr. Dayachand Napal is still full of energy, passion, drive and commitment, in spite of his advanced age.

He is still writing books.

I know he is an avid historian, poet and literary man.

He continues to take a keen interest in the management of the school, walking around and ensuring that nothing is taken for granted, particularly regarding
The quality of education being dispensed in the school as well as on matters of school discipline.

I think Mr Dayachand Napal is a role model for our younger generations to emulate.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It was Victor Hugo, the famous French poet who once said and I quote: -

“He who opens a school door, closes a prison.” (Unquote)

By opening this College 50 years ago, little did Mr and Mrs Napal realize that they were indeed opening a door that would bring a glimmer of hope in the hearts of so many of our young children, boys and girls alike, living in the rural areas and have succeeded in transforming their lives.

I understand at its creation, the College started with only two classes.

From such a modest beginning, the College now prides itself to be a key player in our educational landscape, with a population of 1,800 students, Boys’ and Girls’ Departments, combined.

It also has over 110 teaching staff and 45 non-teaching staff on its roll.

I have also noted that the College is fully equipped with Computer and Chemistry Labs, as well as a Gymnasium for the promotion of sports activities.

Students are furthermore participating in extra-curricular activities such as debates, elocutions, essay-writing, reading, poem recitals, quiz and arts competitions.

More importantly, I have read in the brief submitted to me by Management that the College is running a class on Human Values as an integral part of its curriculum.

You know, I always posit that an educational system isn’t worth a great deal if it only teaches our young people how to make a living and not how to make a life.

And making a life means teaching our children about values.

In the words of William Ralph Inge, “the aim of education is not the knowledge of facts but of values”.

At times, I have the feeling that our education system is producing a generation of “amoral children” who fail to understand the difference between right and wrong.

That is because our students are no longer equipped with traditions and values.
And education without values, as useful as it is or may be, is tantamount to making man a more clever devil.

So glad am I to learn that the teaching of human values is so high on the agenda of the Cosmopolitan College.

Because values coupled with principled behavior will help you keep your feet to the ground and guide you on a sustainable path in this strange and exciting world.

Values such as respect, respect for others, courtesy, good manners are the foundations of a civilized and peaceful society.

We are at present living in an affluent society that makes possible the acquisition of material comfort that was unimaginable decades ago.

Students of your generation never had it so good.

But let me tell you that such material comfort can also be short-lived, particularly if they become wants, wants become needs, needs become desires, desires and self-gratification become a bottomless pit.

There are cases where students raised in affluent surroundings and who have been given all the necessities and comforts of life have often been doomed to failure.

If the Cosmopolitan College has thrived in an extremely competitive educational environment, that is largely due to the quality of education it provides, and more importantly, to the discipline and values that it has inculcated in you, students.

For that matter, most of the private secondary schools have succeeded mainly because of the system of discipline they had put in place.

Unfortunately, and to the extent of repeating myself, I must confess that discipline in our schools has now become a huge challenge.

Even our teachers bother less and less about discipline.

In some schools, indiscipline and unruly behavior and attitude are the norms.

That is very bad.

Mr. Napal, I would like to ask you some questions.

Sir, you have been at the helm of the education sector for over 50 years.

Can you tell us what has gone wrong in our education system, in our schools?

Why is there so much indiscipline?

And whose fault is that? The parents? The teachers or the schools? Or is it a combination of all three?
I am sure your experience speaks volume and you have a lot to share with us in view of reversing the trend.

The Cosmopolitan College has to be congratulated for its rigour and strong discipline, although I must admit that there are some students who still misbehave.

To these students I say, it’s never too late to turn over a new leaf.

Be steadfast and committed in your studies.

Don’t let the bad things of life interfere with your education.

Because your education is the passport to the future, for to-morrow belongs to those of you who prepare for it to-day.

With these words, I would like to thank you all for your invitation this morning.

I congratulate the Prize Winners and wish you all good luck in your endeavor.

May God bless you!

I thank you for your attention.