Speech by H.E. Mr. Rajkeswur Purryag, GCSK, GOSK, President of the Republic of Mauritius, on the occasion of the Opening Ceremony of the celebrations to mark the World Book and Copyright Day on 2 May 2014, at 16 00 hours at the Bagatelle Mall of Mauritius, Bagatelle.

The Honourable Mookeshwar Choonee, Minister of Arts and Culture
Mrs. Amrita Kistamah, Chairperson, National Library Board
Mrs. Belinda Ramnauth, Director, National Library
Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Members of the National Library Board
Dear Students
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon to you all!

I wish to thank the National Library for associating me with the celebrations of the World Book and Copyright Day this year.

It is really an immense pleasure to participate in an event that has an international dimension and significance and is of special importance to our youngsters, students and educators.

It is also gratifying to address a gathering of writers, book lovers, bookshop owners, librarians as well as people from different walks of lives.

As a continuous feature, UNESCO celebrates the World Book and Copyright Day on 23 April every year.

That is a symbolic date for World Literature and for the protection of intellectual property through copyright.

The World Book and Copyright Day is also an occasion to pay tribute to books and their authors across the world and to re-affirm the contribution that they have made for the social, educational and cultural progress of humanity as a whole.

Let me praise the effort of the National Library for keeping up with the tradition of the World Book and Copyright Day.

I am given to understand that this is for the twelfth consecutive year that this event is being organized in Mauritius.

The World Book and Copyright Day is to my mind also an excellent platform to revive, encourage and foster the love for books and a culture of reading among our citizens, and more importantly, among our students and youth.
Books have at all times and in all ages been a great source of information and knowledge.

Indeed, they are very educating and contribute to the development of the intellect, mind and character of a human being.

For those of you who are owners of bookshop know that when you sell a person a book, you are not selling just twelve ounces of paper and ink and glue, rather, you are selling him a whole new life.

Because there’s all heaven and earth in a book.

I mean a real book.

That’s why Mark Twain once said:

(Quote)

“The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can’t read them.” (Unquote)

As I said, to-day, the habit, coupled with the ability to read is highly prized and constitutes a key factor for the development of an individual social and economic advancement.

Therefore, any book that helps us to form and develop a habit of reading, to make reading one of our deep and continuing need is good for us and should be nurtured.

It was the Chinese Philosopher, Confucius, who said:

(Quote)

“You cannot open a book without learning something.” (Unquote)

And in the words of Ernest Hemingway, “there is no friend as loyal as a book.”

Or as Charles W Eliot put it so nicely and I quote:

“Books are the quietest and most constant friends; they are the most accessible and wisest counselors, and the most patient teachers.” (Unquote)

Ladies and Gentlemen

Books never betray us.

Instead, they accompany us, especially when we are alone, or as most of you know, when we are travelling.

Many people even say that, the world itself is a book.
The worth of a book is measured by what we can carry away from it for a good book has no ending.

It is understood that books are vital for any individual for his self-help and personal development from his tender age to adulthood.

It is imperative therefore that we inculcate the culture of reading in our children right from their early age.

Educational researchers have found that there is a strong link between reading and academic success and in the formation of one’s intellect.

A student who reads at least three books in a week is more likely to do well at school.

I have up to now never known an avid reader who has failed academically.

A good reader understands ideas easily, follows arguments and mix with others and can fully participate in and contribute to a debate.

Also, he is a better conversationalist than the one who does not read.

Because reading widens his vision and point of view.

I need not spell out the advantages and benefits of reading.

We know that reading is not only fun but it also enriches our vocabulary, oratorial as well as writing skills.

Furthermore, it enhances our knowledge of things around us as well as develops our thinking process by opening up our mind.

Reading is also known to enable people to think outside the box, because it is an active mental process.

It is said that in the old economy, books generally prepared an individual for a career for life.

In the new economy, thanks to books again, the individual is prepared for a life of careers, that is, to become multi-disciplinary.

I know from my own experience that the more we read, the more we become knowledgeable, and the more we are inspired to achieve in different fields.

Books are of the people, by the people, for the people.

They are in fact the immortal part of history.

In a library or bookshop, you can anytime converse with the World famous writers, poets and philosophers such as Socrates, Shakespeare, Carlyle, Dumas or Dickens.

We see these men at their best.
They burnt the midnight oil to write for us.

They laid themselves out to entertain us, to make us better and more knowledgeable and to educate us.

And in recent years, modern writers have also written on a host of issues ranging from economics, management, marketing, philosophy, literature, science, arts, you name it, in order to shape our lives and develop our path.

Therefore, as you celebrate the World Book and Copyright Day, it is fitting that you pay tribute to all those illustrious writers who make such a remarkable contribution for our benefit.

Unfortunately, to-day mankind is sacrificing the culture of reading books on the altar of technology.

Let me stress that technology cannot and will never be able to replace the value of a good book.

Books remain and will continue to remain the magic.

At the same time, we have to also recognize the contribution of our local writers.

These people are making considerable effort to write in spite of numerous challenges they have to face.

Although they know that writing is not generally a lucrative source of income, yet their passion, their love for books dominate all materialistic considerations.

Writing is a very tedious and cumbersome activity.

That’s why it is important that we encourage our local writers to write.

Human being is not made just for making a living.

He has to also leave his foot print in this world.

And this is precisely what writers are doing – leaving their foot prints for the generations to come.

There is nothing as noble as writing.

To all our writers, I want to say: just keep writing.

Because if you are destined to be a writer, it will work itself out - a gift that is not given to everyone of us.

You just keep feeding it your energy with sincerity and passion.

Listen to yourself.
If you are excited by what you are writing, you have a much better chance of putting that excitement over to a reader.

I also believe that the National Library can play a lead role in popularising the creative works of our local writers.

To-day, it is difficult to find a book that has been written decades ago.

Not only books but also information, papers about the history, social and political, of our country.

The wealth of information that is available in the country is nowhere to be found.

Fortunately, thanks to Yvan Martial, and a few other historians, we have the nostalgia of reading from time to time, about many interesting features regarding our country.

I have in my office at Le Réduit, a series of documents and books that date back to the 19th Century.

And they contain invaluable historical facts that I believe our people should know about.

*Ladies and Gentlemen*

Since last week, I have been reading very passionately some interesting articles in the Press in the wake of the World Book and Copyright Day.

A number of concerns have also been expressed and rightly so, in certain quarters, as regards the future of bookshops and libraries, especially, with the advent of the internet, E-books, digital publishing, etc. that have revolutionized the transmission of information.

Naturally, developments in the technological field have had a great impact in the business of books and the manner in which people read these days.

Some years ago, we would never have imagined buying a whole book on CD-Rom, for instance.

Likewise, the internet is to-day full of e-books.

Of course, I will not talk about the costs associated with buying e-books or accessing them on the internet.

We do realize for that matter that e-books is a flourishing business.

Does that however mean that e-books will take over from the printed world?

Will e-books be the books of the future or are they books of the present already?
These are interesting questions that should elicit a lot of interest from bookshop owners, librarians, all of us alike.

And I am glad that these questions have been canvassed in the press articles I referred to earlier.

Some multi-media companies engaged in the business of e-books have even predicted that in a few years’ time, the production of newspapers and magazines would go down by almost 50%, and even worse, they will disappear from the market, as people will be turning to their computers to get the latest news.

My own view is that there’s something about print that we cannot give up easily.

For example, the pleasure of holding a book in our hand and the act of physically turning a page cannot be substituted.

There are studies that indicate that over 90% of e-book readers still continue to read physical books.

This means that e-books and print books are complementary and could have a bright future together.

But on a more personal note, I think that print and paper will have a more lasting value.

Books have been around for a long time and have survived many technological upheaval.

And they will withstand the digital onslaught.

The magic of print books will remain the value of a library.

Libraries as much as bookshops play a very important role in society.

Apart from cataloguing information on a multiplicity of issues, they also provide us with opportunities for learning through books, magazines, newspapers and even multi-media tools.

It is the first place where a child may delve into a book and spend hours reading.

Libraries as much as bookshops have always been synonymous with education.

Indeed, our future depends on them.

They are really the gates of the future.

They are not luxuries but necessities of life.
Therefore, if we want to make sure that we raise literate children, the simplest way is to show them the way to the library and the bookshop.

And that means helping them find books that they enjoy, giving them access to those books and encouraging them to read.

As Albert Einstein put it so beautifully: -

(Quote)

“The only thing that you absolutely have to know is the location of the library.”

Here, I am also reminded of what a famous author said:

(Quote)

“Let books be your dining table,
And you shall be full of delights.
Let them be your mattress
And you shall sleep restful nights.” (Unquote)

Ladies and Gentlemen

With these words, I wish to thank the National Library again for having given me the opportunity to address you this afternoon.

It is my pleasure now to declare open this World Book and Copyright Day.

I thank you for your attention.