

Address by

Her Excellency Mrs. Ameenah Gurib-Fakim,

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President of the Republic of Mauritius

on the occasion of the "Journée de Réflexion"

Commemoration of the

International Anti-Corruption Day 2016

Friday 9 December 2016 at 9 30 hours

Octave Wiehe Auditorium, Reduit

His Excellency the Vice-President of the Republic of Mauritius

Mr Navin Bheekhar, Director-General of the ICAC

Board Members of ICAC

Mr Simon Springett, UNDP Resident Representative

Dr Tapiwa, Regional Coordinator, Transparency International, Southern Africa,

Mr Carlos Zara, CEO, Mauritius Institute of Directors

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning!

Let me extend a warm welcome to Dr Tapiwa, Regional Coordinator, Southern Africa, for his presence amongst us on this auspicious occasion, and thank you for having associated me with the commemoration of the International Anti-Corruption Day this year.

This is the 13th International Anti-Corruption Day that is being commemorated in Mauritius.

It's a good sign and an excellent way to promote an anti-corruption culture in our country.

Your presence shows that each one of you here attaches as much importance as I do to the fight against corruption, and to improving governance to ensure inclusive growth and development.

The Anti-Corruption Day has become a worldwide event as the international community acknowledges that corruption is a global concern that has to be tackled in all its forms and manifestations.

According to the World Economic Forum report, it is believed that the cost of corruption equals more than 5% of global GDP amounting to US\$ 2.6 trillion with over US\$ 1 trillion paid in bribes each year.

Corruption, thus, not only diverts funds from priority areas but leads to instability, poverty and hampers development in all sectors of economic activity.

It also fuels organized criminal networks and encourages criminal activities such as human trafficking, arms smuggling and money laundering.

During the recent years, we have witnessed two global trends in regard to the fight against corruption.

Firstly, we have seen a series of staggering cases of global corruption being exposed and investigated.

And secondly, we have witnessed countries and international organizations reaffirming forcefully their commitment to fight corruption and making great strides towards investigating, punishing and preventing corruption and corrupt practices.

Never before have had governments, multinational and international institutions so extensively collaborating in uprooting corruption.

There has been an increase in global commitments to do away with the evil of corruption especially in the face of the recent high profile international scams.

There is now a worldwide recognition that cooperation and collaboration in fighting the scourge of corruption is imperative.

Indeed, fighting corruption and promoting the values and principles of good governance has become an international priority because it is increasingly being viewed as the obstacle to development and growth.

The Anti-Corruption Summit held in London in May this year has brought to the fore the need for countries to pull their effort together against corruption and illicit financial transactions.

In spite of international efforts and cooperation, and the existing legal frameworks, the question that is being constantly asked is: why are major cases of corruption still prevailing in many countries across the world?

That is because the nature of corruption is becoming extremely complex and those who are engaged in corrupt practices are too smart and are able through the use of state-of-the-art technology to circumvent anti-corruption measures and systems.

The fight against corruption has become a global phenomenon and it is widely recognized that no Government can on its own tackle it effectively.

International cooperation and effort including the commitment and support of the civil society is increasingly crucial.

There is evidence to suggest that where the civil society is working in partnership with government and the private sector, the success rate in terms of control of systemic corruption is higher and the results have been encouraging.

There is also significant evidence around the world on the critical role the civil society has played over the years in promoting participatory government and holding it to account.

There is also a growing recognition of the impact of citizen participation on strengthening democracy and service delivery.

I am glad the theme chosen by the UN to mark the International Anti-Corruption Day this year is “United Against Corruption”.

The theme acknowledges that Governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, the media and citizens around the world must come together to fight corruption, which according to me is one of the biggest challenges that beset countries in this century.

The impact of corruption on societies can never be underestimated.

Because most of the time, it's the vulnerable people, particularly, the poor who suffer most from corruption and corrupt practices.

In reality, corruption and its corollary governance is a tax on the poor.

We are privileged and lucky indeed, to live in a country where there is the rule of law.

Our citizens are insisting on greater accountability. In other words, they want to be given an account of how each and every single rupee they pay as tax is being spent.

There is a call for open and more transparent government.

Our elected officials are under pressure for more governance and less government in the management of public affairs.

The notion of accountability, which many refer to as democratic accountability, is deeply rooted in our various legislations.

Accountability, transparency, and open government are the pillars upon which our democracy and democratic traditions, values and principles are constructed, and which in turn imply better governance.

The nature of our democracy posits that those who are vested with authority and power justify their actions and decisions.

They have a duty to give an account and the citizens have the right to hold them to account.

In a democracy, all voices are entitled to be heard.

No issue can be assumed to be of no concern to the citizenry.

It therefore beholds our elected representatives to find many languages to give many accounts.

Likewise, our citizens need to exercise their duties and rights by challenging or influencing public policies that affect them most.

They should be empowered and encouraged to monitor the quality of public spending while urging for greater transparency and accountability in service delivery.

A better informed and active citizenry, who can put pressure on national institutions to be accountable and responsive to citizens' needs and priorities, is fundamental in the fight against corruption.

I am convinced that as a country, we have the potential and the capacity to sweep out corruption and say "no" to impunity.

Our youth also have a key role to play in promoting an anti-corruption culture in our country.

The importance of engaging our youth in anti-corruption initiatives cannot be overemphasized as nearly half of the world's population (almost 3 billion people) is under the age of 25, according to the World Population Foundation.

Our young minds can help change attitudes and build a zero-tolerance culture for corruption while striving for an open and transparent society.

That's why it is imperative that we raise and equip our young generations with such sustainable values and principled behaviors as will enable them to face and deal with the complexities of life.

At the same time, our citizens should strive to adopt cleaner practices by subscribing to established procedures while respecting the rule of law.

We call for a change in the mindset of our citizens for the betterment of the society and for the future of our children.

I am aware that a lot of initiatives have been taken by ICAC in the furtherance of an anti-corruption culture.

But fighting corruption is a relentless, long and tedious battle, full of hurdles and obstacles.

It will never be plain sailing, especially given the complex nature of corruption and the intricacies of white collar crime.

We need however to keep on and step up our effort through the collaboration of all the stakeholders, local as much as international.

That's how we will succeed.

We have in our midst today a wide range of participants-from the public sector, the private sector, the civil society, the judiciary, the media, and the youth, to reflect together and to find ways and means, better methods and new strategies in the fight against corruption and to make our country less prone to corrupt practices.

I wish to call on each one of you to upscale your efforts in ensuring that integrity is upheld at all levels.

As Joe Biden, the US Vice-President has said and I quote:

"Fighting corruption is not just good governance. It's self defence. It's patriotism." [Unquote]

I urge you therefore to join us in this national effort and act of patriotism.

When we act together, we can make a difference in this fight against corruption, for the lasting benefit of our people and our country.

In conclusion, let me share with you what Abraham Lincoln once said:

[Quote]: "I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live by the light that I have. I must stand with anybody that stands right, and stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong." [Unquote]

These are very inspiring words from a great statesman that has shaped the world.

They should guide you in your mission to transform our society.

Because the time is always right to do right, when couched in the fierce urgency of now.

And you need courage to stand up and speak and do your little bit of good in the wider interest of our country and the next generations.

With these words, I would like thank ICAC again for their invitation.

I wish you all well and good luck in your future endeavors.

I thank you for your attention.