



Speech by

Her Excellency Mrs Ameenah Gurib-Fakim,

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President of the Republic

on the occasion

of the

Launching Ceremony of the Book

'From Le Réduit to the State House' & 'Du Réduit à la State House'

Wednesday 7th March 2018 at 16.30

State House, Le Réduit

His Excellency, the Vice President of the Republic,

Honorable Deputy Prime Minister,

Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps,

Honorary Consuls,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the State house on a rather rare event... the launching of a book on the State House.

Is this yet another book on the state house? Well no.. There's been a few publications before on the subject but this one casts a different light on the subject by bringing in a scientific slant.

Botany in the 18th and 19th century, was really a sophisticated science that kept the passions of intellectuals and even monarchs very much alive.

It would appear that in those days, plant collection was another medium through which international disputes could be resolved... obviously things have changed since.

In 1746, the successor of Mahe de Labourdonnais, Pierre Felix Barthelmy David landed in Mauritius right in the midst of Franco-British rivalries.

He was conscious of the dangers that the British represented and he decided to construct a building that could be used as refuge in the event of an invasion by the British.

In its initial concept, the building is where the sundial is at present – next to the flag pole outside... so had nothing to do with the building as we know it now.

There were allegedly other motivations for David's choice of locale and I am sure you will enjoy discovering them in the book.

Finally in 1750, the building was completed and some parts of the building today are part of the building as early as 1778.

Fortunately the ambitions of David did not stop with the building only.

He also wanted a garden and hired Jean Baptiste Fusee Aublet, famous botanist, to create a botanical garden.

The latter was meant to be receiving spice plants from Pierre Poivre who was already in the Far East fighting both the British and the Dutch with a view to breaking the cartel that had been imposed then.

The imported plants were acclimatized in Le Réduit area before being sent out to the other colonies.

Some of the trees are still found growing in the gardens of the State House. Some of the old Camphor trees are among some of them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This room where we are right now is the famous ballroom where Lady Gomm entertained her guests and many invitations were sent out to her guests with the famous blue penny stamps.

It was under the authority of Sir Charles Colville that Le Réduit becomes the place for hosting receptions and other civilities.

The contribution of Sir Colville to botany has been recognized. The colvillea plant honors him. It is also found in the book and in the Réduit garden.

These are some of the events and there's much more that have marked our journey from the French period, who have created this magnificent building to what has now become the state house – the official residence of governors and now presidents of the Republic.

The State House today stands on a property of over 250 acres.

At the edge of the world, one is guaranteed a spectacular view of the two rivers and there have been a few additions to the garden: Medicinal plant garden that I had the great joy of creating when Sir Aneerood Jugnauth was the President.

Now there's the Bamboo garden, the Gabriel d'Argent arboretum, the Cactus garden and the Arboretum for rare endemic plants of Rodrigues.

Again, the idea is for pedagogy. One cannot teach conservation if one cannot see and feel these plants.

I would recommend that you visit and discover our unique flora if not physically, at least in this book!

I could even say that this book also highlights the legacy of Le Réduit gardens to the amazing field of botany.

I cannot end this speech without recognizing the contributions of the individuals and companies who have given so much to make it happen.

The Mauritius Commercial Bank for giving us the services of:

- **Mr Emmanuel Richon, Curator of the Blue Penny Museum and has written the text in French.**
- **For granting us the permission to publish some of the rare photos of Le Réduit.**
- **A special thought for late Mr Ryan Coopamah who believed in this project right from the start.**
- **The National Committee for funding the publication**
- **Mr Michael Bootle for translating the text in English**
- **From the team from the State House including Mr Motichand Seebah, Mr Toriden Chellapermal, Rachna Seenauth, Micheline Pelletier, Keshawve Jeewon, Nizam Khodabux, Sadhna Seechurn**
- **Mr Jean Francois Sookayet thank you for your patience!**

I thank you all and apologies if I have missed anyone!