



SPEECH

**His Excellency Mr Dharambeer Gokhool G.C.S.K.,
President of the Republic of Mauritius**

**EVENT: Opening Ceremony of the International
Conference on the UNESCO Routes of
Enslaved Peoples**

**VENUE: Auditorium Octave Wiehe,
University of Mauritius**

TIME: 09 30 Hours

Honourable Mahendra Gondeea, Minister of Arts and Culture

Hon Ashok Subron, Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity

Representatives of the UNESCO and International Scientific Committee of Routes of Enslaved Peoples

Professor Sanjeev Sobhee, Vice-Chancellor, University of Mauritius

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning. Welcome and thank you for your presence here today.

It is an absolute privilege to be part of the International Conference on the UNESCO Routes of Enslaved Peoples.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary General of the United Nations, His Excellency Antonio Guterres, for extending all his support for this important and historical conference.

As mentioned by previous speakers, the theme of the Conference is **“Resistance, Liberty, Heritage in the Western Indian Ocean”** and

it is being organised in the context of the 190th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Mauritius.

The Routes of Enslaved Peoples project aims at “**De-racialising**” and “**Decolonising**” our worldview of history and humanity,

by bringing together scholars, intellectuals and civil society to reflect on the link between impact of enslavement and current societal challenges, and the proposed possible solutions to foster more equitable, inclusive and fairer societies, respectful of human rights.

As an academic and a former Dean of Faculty of the University of Mauritius myself, I firmly believe in the power of research-based evidence and intellectual discourse in preserving history and understand its impact on our present.

They allow us to illuminate hidden narratives, challenge prevailing misconceptions, **decolonise our minds**, and ensure that the memory of those who came before us remains alive.

This conference embodies this very pursuit of knowledge, truth and justice.

The abolition of slavery did not happen in isolation. It was the culmination of courage, perseverance, revolts and sacrifices by people who aspired to turn the world into one where every human being could live with equal dignity. We remember their fight and honour their resilience.

Routes of Enslaved Peoples Project

Slave trade and the enslavement of people of colour have been among the worst and longest - lasting crimes against humanity.

The scars of systemic exploitation still manifest through contemporary inequalities. Addressing these legacies requires profound collective will and continuous dialogue.

I commend the Ministry of Arts and Culture, the UNESCO, the University of Mauritius for this laudable initiative, and thank our

national and international delegates for coming together to work towards meaningful action.

It is imperative that the deliberations, conclusions and recommendations have impactful and sustainable outcomes that enable the advancement of knowledge, in turn culminating into a plethora of benefits that humanity at large can reap.

It is more important that the new acquired knowledge be accessible to our younger generations. In the age of Chat GPT, Deepseek and digital transformation, the significance of History, Anthropology and Psychology should not be undermined.

Instead, we should all come together to leverage these new technologies to spark the curiosity, interest and passion of the future architects of our nation's destiny in the above disciplines.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mauritius has been an active participant in the Slave Route Project since 2005. We are woven together by shared suffering and resilience, and we remain committed to preserving memory through sites like the Aapravasi Ghat and Le Morne Cultural Landscape.

As enshrined in our Constitution, we stand as one people, as one nation — united in peace, justice, and liberty. It is our diversity that strengthens us, and it is through unity that we continue to forge a better future.

“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived. But if faced with courage, need not be lived again.”

These words by Maya Angelou resonate profoundly as we collectively embark on this intellectual exchange from a place of honesty, integrity, mutual respect and shared values.

Let this conference therefore serve as a platform for reflection, reconciliation, and progress.

I take this opportunity to thank all organisers and contributors once again for their unflinching and dedicated efforts in making this Conference happen.

I invite our distinguished international guests to take full advantage of our Mauritian hospitality.

On this note, I declare the International Conference on the UNESCO Routes of Enslaved Peoples open. May this gathering inspire us to continue the work of truth, remembrance, and unity.

Thank you.