SPEECH

His Excellency Mr Dharambeer Gokhool G.C.S.K.,

President of the Republic of Mauritius

EVENT: INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM

VENUE: LES SUITES BY THE DOCKS,

UNITED DOCKS BUSINESS PARK,

CAUDAN

TIME: 09 30 HOURS

Dr the Hon' Avinash Ramtohul, Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation

Hon Mrs Marie Arianne Navarre-Marie, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare

Ms Alia Hirji, Chief of Mission for IOM Mauritius and Seychelles

Ms Anja Gengo, NRI Initiative Coordinator, United Nations IGF

Mrs Aneeta Ghoorah, Ombudsperson for Children

Mr Mahendranath Busgopaul, Director of Mauritius IGF and Secretary-General, Halley Movement Coalition

Distinguished Guests,

Esteemed Panelists and Participants,

Members of the Media.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is with profound honor and a deep sense of duty that I address you today at the 9th edition of the Mauritius Internet Governance Forum.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the **Halley Movement Coalition** for organizing this important event and for inviting me as the Guest of Honor.

I also extend a very warm welcome to **Ms. Anja Gengo** from the United Nations Internet Governance Forum, whose presence here underscores the global significance of the themes that this forum will explore.

I have listened with great attention to previous speakers who have contributed significantly to this forum already. I will try to avoid any repetition albeit some degree of overlap is bound to occur.

I request your patience and understanding.

Halley Movement Coalition

The Halley Movement for Social and Community Development has, since its inception in the 1990s, played a pivotal role in promoting **social justice**, **digital inclusivity**, and **community development** in Mauritius and beyond.

Through its membership of the African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council and its Secretary-General having served as the Deputy Presiding Officer of Eastern Africa, it has amplified Mauritius' voice on critical issues of digital governance and social equity.

I commend and congratulate the Halley Movement and its partners for their continued efforts in shaping multi-stakeholder dialogues on **digital rights**, **child protection**, and **AI ethics** and for organizing the Mauritius IGF 2025.

Internet Governance Forum 2025

The theme for this year's Forum- **AI, Cybersecurity, and Digital Trust: Pioneering a Secure Future** - is profoundly timely and crucial.

With the rapid advancement of AI, the technological ecosystem is being transformed in a profound way.

According to the World Bank, AI can potentially contribute $13 trillion to the global economy by 2030.

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) with a global vision, Mauritius is fully aware of the transformative potential that technology holds in revolutionising its industries- from healthcare to education, agriculture, finance, social security, environment and beyond.

However, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that the transformative power of AI is harnessed responsibly and ethically, for a future built on trust.

Our government programme 2025-2029 has already demonstrated our commitment towards fostering innovation, transparency, accountability, safety and inclusivity via significant measures, including **Constitutional reviews and amendments** to further consolidate Digital Rights and be a Hi-Tech Intelligent Island.

Nevertheless, forging a **common, resilient and safe digital future** is not possible without regional, international and cross-sectoral cooperation.

Mauritius is committed to working with international organisations like the UN and AU, as well as regional and local stakeholders.

The Halley Movement is a shining example of how civil society can play an equally pivotal role in shaping robust frameworks for good digital governance.

Remember that the collective choices we make now will not only shape the trajectory of our nation but also define our role in the **global technological ecosystem**.

We are on the threshold of the next stage of human civilization.

We must therefore strive to position ourselves as trustworthy drivers of ethical, transparent and sustainable digital innovation.

Digital Future: Opportunities and Challenges.

Today, the virtual- though intangible- is real. Digital Rights are Human Rights. As we embrace opportunities of the digital age, **we must be able to safely navigate complexities and risks associated with technology.**

The development and deployment of AI raise complex ethical, social and security questions.

Issues such as algorithmic bias, job displacement, privacy concerns and the potential for misuse demand careful consideration and proactive solutions.

- Our youth, the digital natives of this era, represent the energy, creativity and passion so essential to unlock AI's full potential. How do we ensure that they become responsible AI citizens?

- While Deepseek, ChatGPT and DeepL have enhanced learning, our children and youngsters face the dangers of DeepFake, cyberbullying, online exploitation and sexual abuse, and the pressure of perfection, leading to depression, loneliness, substance abuse and suicide.

We have to be conscious of the risks of **"sharenting"** - the practice of parents sharing photos and information about children online, with high risks of privacy violation and cyberbullying.

Here, I would like to commend one of the initiatives of the Halley Movement which has had significant impact: **Helpline Mauritius** — the first free online counselling service for children and vulnerable communities, launched in 2012.

This initiative has helped countless individuals navigate challenges in the digital age, providing support for issues ranging from cyberbullying to mental health concerns.

The Halley Movement's commitment to child protection and internet safety has also been recognised on global platforms, including its participation as a speaker at United Nations meetings.

- The gender gap in the realm of technology remains significant, with women making up only 22 percent of the workforce in fields such as AI.

- With a shifting demographic landscape, we have an ageing population which acts as the bridge between the past and the future but are not well-versed with evolving technology. The risks of an inter-generational digital divide and exclusion are not to be ignored.

- It is true that AI will not replace humans, but humans with AI and digital creativity are replacing humans without AI in universities and workplaces as we shift to a data-driven culture in organizations.

Civil servants, as guardians of public trust and as critical agents in the provision of quality public service, improving efficiency and policy-making, have the responsibility of implementing AI- powered solutions. This requires a data-driven culture.

How do we ensure that civil servants embrace a data-driven culture with a focus on data quality, accessibility and security?

- How do we empower the civil society to play their role effectively as the conscience of the digital era, advocating ethical considerations in the responsible development and adoption of AI, holding governments and corporations accountable in a transparent manner?

- How do we ensure that the carbon-footprint of AI due to its energy-intensive processes, leading to substantial greenhouse gas emissions and rising concerns about the environment, remain within acceptable norms and standards?

There is the pressing need to **ensure digital literacy and empowerment**, **equitable access to resources, and comfort with digital tools**, not just for our youths, but also **senior citizens and civil servants.**

At the same time, we need to also remember that our progress towards AI should not come at the expense of our physical human connections, emotional intelligence, cultural and human values, or our spiritual understanding.

A Call to Action

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we gather here today, it is crucial that we not only discuss technology but also take decisive action —to uphold inclusive digital skills development, robust cybersecurity, equity and above all, foster **digital trust and accountability.**

We must protect human dignity and our most vulnerable at all costs.

As the President of the Republic, I reaffirm my support to government initiatives like the Safer Internet Campaign and civil-society forums like the Mauritius IGF.

These are more than conversations — they are catalysts for transformation.

I urge you all – innovators, leaders, advocates: Let us move forward together, committed to a secure, ethical, and inclusive digital future — one that reflects our values, protects our rights, and unlocks our shared potential.

Conclusion

In closing, allow me to once again congratulate the Halley Movement Coalition and its partners for their unwavering dedication to human rights and digital inclusion.

On this note, I officially declare the Mauritius Internet Governance Forum 2025 open.

I hope that today's panel discussions will offer vital input to establish regulatory sandboxes for emerging technologies, invest in energy-efficient AI models to address environmental impact, and train a new generation of digitally empowered and safe Mauritians.

Long live the Republic of Mauritius.

Long live the spirit of innovation and unity.

Thank you for your attention.