



SPEECH

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

**EVENT: International Day of Women and Girls
in Science / World Understanding
Month**

**VENUE: Gymkhana Club,
Vacoas**

TIME: 18 00 Hours

Excellency Ms Kate Chamley, High Commissioner of Australia

Commander Ankush Sachdeva, Officer-in-Charge of the Mauritius Hydrographic Service, Ministry of Housing and Lands

Dr Devika Saddul, President of the Organisation for Women in Science for the Developing World – Mauritius Chapter

Esteemed Women Scientists,

Mr Rajiv Bhageerutty, President of the Rotary Club – Vacoas

Members of the Mauritius Gymkhana Club

Distinguished Guests,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good evening.

Thank you for inviting me to be part of the joint celebration of the 10th International Day of Women and Girls in Science, and the World Understanding Month.

It is an immense honour to address you on this special occasion. I congratulate the organisers for this laudable initiative.

This celebration is a milestone not only because it recognizes and acknowledges the invaluable contributions of Women in Science, but also because it offers an opportunity to reassess and reaffirm our commitment to Gender Equality and Equity

Mauritian Women Achievers

Across the world and in Mauritius, women and girls are defying odds, breaking barriers, and thriving in various fields, in particular the field of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

I welcome in our midst our distinguished achievers here this evening. They symbolise the limitless potential and power of women in these fields.

I thank and congratulate our esteemed scientists for their passion, courage, determination and their resilience to leave behind their comfort zones and brave the high seas to excel in their respective fields of scientific expertise:

From Hydrography to Cartography, and joining the 43rd Indian Scientific Expedition to the Antarctica to undertake research with a focus on climate change and its impacts on marine organisms and ecosystems.

You are the first Mauritian women in your fields of expertise, but I am confident that you will not be the last, and that your journey will illuminate the way forward for many other women in our country.

You symbolize the strength and pride of our nation, placing us at par with other women scientists around the world.

I hope that in the future, the participation and achievements of Mauritian women in the fields of oceanography and marine sciences, as well as in other fields, will be a reality so tangible and normalised

that we will not feel the need to refer to them as “women hydrographers” or “women cartographers”, but simply hydrographers and cartographers, much like doctors, lawyers or educators.

OWSD and The Beijing Declaration And Platform for Action 1995

I also thank the OWSD- Mauritius Chapter and the Rotary Club of Vacoas for this initiative.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science and the sixth anniversary of OWSD-Mauritius.

This is an opportunity to look back at major activities such as inter-university debates, the MT180 contest, one-day workshops and awareness sessions which you were part of, in collaboration with the Australian High Commission, among others.

I would like you to reflect not only on what has been accomplished but also on what could have been achieved. This occasion must serve as a moment of introspection— particularly post-COVID-19— to assess what remains to be done and what decisive actions can be taken for the future.

Moreover, we must explore how modern and emerging technologies— such as artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, and DeepSeek—can be leveraged to add value to this important cause.

Ladies and Gentleman,

This year also marks the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995, which aims at removing all obstacles to women's full participation in public and private life.

It is also the 10th year since the UN General Assembly proclaimed the International Day of Women and Girls in Science to recognize their critical role and contributions.

As I address you here today, I am reminded of the courage and achievements of prominent women who have created history, such as Marie–Curie, Rachel Carson, Gitanjali Rao and Jane Goodall.

Today, in male-dominated areas like logistics and transport operations, women are contributing to the development of global trade and mobility of people in many ways.

In fact, last month, I received at the State House, Mrs Vicky Koo, Global Chairperson of Women in Logistics and Transport, a network which spreads across 22 territories. Her passion and dedication are truly inspiring.

Barriers

Yet, despite the vast potential and talent, women and girls continue to face systemic barriers in pursuing STEM careers.

A survey of medics by the British Medical Association in 2021 revealed that nine in ten female doctors experienced sexism at work, including unwanted physical contact and denial of opportunities

From stereotypes to gender-based violence, the statistics are alarming. One in two female scientists have reported experiencing sexual harassment at work; they face pay discriminations and encounter limited career opportunities.

I recall reading a press interview of Yeeshtdevisingh Hosanee, a young Mauritian computer programming expert, teacher and author.

During the pandemic, she leveraged her skills to create two mobile applications to help the public.

The first was NouTiket, which helped reduce long waiting lines in supermarkets, offices and hospitals. The second was NouLardoise, a virtual notebook.

Last year, she won the 2024 Global Recognition Award for her efforts in promoting ICT literacy among children and the youth.

In her interview, she shared how, as a child, she never liked receiving dolls as a gift, but loved phones or toy-machines that she could open to see how they were built.

She also highlighted the challenges she faced at university, where most of her classmates were male, and how her female peers hesitated to participate in discussions for fear of being perceived as less intelligent.

While the number of scientists is on the increase globally, women continue to be underrepresented in many fields.

- Only one in three scientists worldwide is a woman.
- Women represent only around 31.5% of all researchers,
- Women authorship of publications is 30%
- Pay in Computer Science and Engineering is lower by 27%
- In the aviation industry, men are primarily chosen for piloting roles, while women continue to be mostly assigned to flight attendants.
- In fields such as Artificial Intelligence, women make up only 22 percent of the workforce.
- Just 2% of venture capital goes to tech startups led by women.

But everything is not doom and gloom. It is projected that gender parity will be reached in:

- Biology by 2069
- Chemistry by 2087
- Engineering, Mathematics, and Physics between 2144 and 2158

Closing the Gender Gap

In Mauritius, the pass rate of female school students succeeding in subjects like Biology and Chemistry has decreased by almost 30 percent over the last three years.

Meanwhile, the overall proportion of students pursuing science subjects remains around 25-30%.

This is a major challenge for our education system in a world increasingly shaped by digital transformation, climate change, food security, and an aging population.

That is why the theme of 2025 International Day of Women and Girls in Science is Unpacking STEM Careers: Her Voice in Science

All of this sends a strong message: We must inspire young girls to see themselves as future engineers, researchers, and leaders in science from the start. We must create environments that encourage and support them academically, professionally, personally and socially.

Organizations like Women in Tech Mauritius and the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre continue to empower girls and women in technology via debates, competitions and workshops.

Government is making significant strides in promoting education and gender equality through MoUs with our development partners to facilitate capacity building.

But much still needs to be done.

The gender gap will not close and the strongest of measures will not work if we don't embrace the quest for equity and equality.

Men are not women's enemies; they are partners.

Feminism isn't about putting women above men or about hating men.

It is about humanising women by giving them equal opportunities, equal respect and equal pay for the same level of competence they are able to display.

Women make up half of our population, and their voices, ideas, and discoveries are crucial for national development. We cannot move forward if half of us is left behind.

It is about viewing women as equal beings with the same rights and dignity as guaranteed under law and the Constitution.

The Evolution of STEM to STREAM

Ladies and Gentlemen

Before I conclude, I want to highlight an important evolution in STEM education.

While STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) has long been the foundation of scientific learning, many countries are now transitioning towards STEAM, which incorporates the Arts as a vital component of critical thinking and innovation.

More recently, the concept has evolved into STREAM, which includes Reading and wRiting as fundamental elements.

I leave you this thought to you as you shape the future of education and research in Mauritius.

Literacy, critical thinking, and creativity are now seen as integral to a well-rounded curriculum.

Conclusion

Let me congratulate you all once again for this laudable initiative. I hope that today's awareness session will spark your curiosity, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation.

Remember the words of Mae Jemison, American engineer, physician, and former NASA astronaut:

“Don't let anyone rob you of your imagination, your creativity, or your curiosity.”

Let this celebration be a call to action — ensuring that the doors of science remain open to all, today and always.

Thank you for your attention.