



SPEECH

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

**EVENT: LAUNCH OF MAURITIUS ART AND CULTURE
INVESTMENT SUMMIT 2026**

VENUE: TAMARINA GOLF CLUB

DATE: 23 MARCH 2026

TIME: 19:00 HOURS

Protocol

Honourable Mrs. Shirin Aumeeruddy-Cziffra, Speaker of the National Assembly;

Honourable Ministers and Junior Ministers,

Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Ms. Zaahirah Muthy, CEO, ZeeArts Ltd

Distinguished Guests from Mauritius and abroad

All Protocol Observed

Introduction

Good evening, and thank you for your kind invitation and for the opportunity to address you on this important occasion.

We are gathered this evening for the official launch of the Mauritius Art and Culture Investment Summit, being held for the very first time in our country.

I must begin by sharing with you that the idea of such a Summit was discussed with me during a meeting that I had with Ms. Zaahirah Muthy at State House on 15 August 2025.

Our exchange focused on the potential of establishing a structured platform in Mauritius to connect art, investment, and sustainable development, under the broader framework of the Mauritius International Art Fair, to which I have continued to lend my full and unwavering support.

Tonight's event is the continuation of that initial discussion - now translated into a concrete, forward-looking national and regional initiative.

The Summit builds on the momentum of the Mauritius International Art Fair, now in its third edition, and extending its mission towards

investment, policy dialogue and regional engagement - including the forthcoming Biennale des Îles de l'Océan Indien.

I therefore thank and commend all organisers, including Ms. Zaahirah Muthy; the Ministry of Arts and Culture, as well as all institutional partners, sponsors, and collaborators, for their efforts in bringing this initiative to fruition.

I also extend a warm welcome to all distinguished panelists, delegates and guests from abroad, and hope that you are enjoying our warm Mauritian hospitality.

MACIS 2026

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Summit aims to position Mauritius as a cultural and creative hub within Africa and the Indian Ocean.

I understand that the discussions will focus on a number of key objectives: to recognise art and culture not only as expressions of identity, creativity and connections across societies and regions, but also as drivers of investment, innovation, and sustainable development, the development of sustainable markets for African cultural production, and the integration of arts and culture within ESG frameworks.

The conversations and exchanges **must** therefore be informed, practical, and forward-looking, reflecting economic trends and how value is increasingly being defined across new sectors.

Globally, the creative economy is among the fastest-growing sectors, contributing significantly to GDP and employment, particularly among youth and women.

Mauritius must position itself decisively within this expanding global value chain.

We must, however, keep in mind that Art is a paradox - both a mirror and a messenger.

Through beauty, form, and expression, it reflects the world as it is, while revealing how it must evolve.

Together with culture, they inform our conscience, challenge perceptions, and give voice to lived realities and experiences that are often overlooked, yet deeply felt.

In an era marked by rapid technological change and global uncertainty, art also serves as a stabilising force by anchoring identity and inspiring innovation.

Advancing UN SDGs through Arts and Culture

In this context, it is vital to recognise that arts and culture intersect directly with the Sustainable Development Goals, even if they are not always explicitly visible as a standalone objective within the 2030 Agenda.

Art and culture act as both an enabler and a cross-cutting driver, contributing, among others, to a number of SDGs:

- SDG 4 on quality education,
- SDG 5 on gender equality,
- SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth,
- SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, and
- SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities.

There is also an ongoing proposal to establish culture as a dedicated “18th Sustainable Development Goal” to provide a clearer, measurable framework for cultural policy, to strengthen cultural diplomacy, and to anchor sustainability more firmly in local identities.

Because in our own societies and across the global cultural landscape, significant disparities persist in achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

This remains an important, evolving global conversation.

Also, allow me to share just one example in relation to SDG 5 on gender equality.

While women perform the majority of unpaid domestic cooking globally, around 80% of professional chefs are male, including in high-end kitchens and Michelin-starred establishments.

This pattern extends across the wider cultural and creative sector, where women remain underrepresented in leadership, visibility, and market outcomes, despite strong participation at entry levels.

These disparities are not coincidental; they persist due to structural and cultural factors, which require our attention.

Addressing these imbalances is not only a question of fairness, but an economic imperative, as inclusive creative industries are more innovative, resilient, and globally competitive.

Mauritius: Challenges and Opportunities

Mauritius is not outside this reality.

Culture and the arts must form part of this conversation, and of the change we are seeking to advance.

The Government Programme 2025-2029 that I presented to the nation in January last year, already outlines several concrete measures to strengthen the sector.

These include the organisation of an “Assises des Arts et de la Culture” to develop a strategic action plan for 2025-2029; the introduction of legislation to recognise cultural workers in line with international standards, and the establishment of support mechanisms to create a more enabling environment for artists.

It also provides for a cultural desk to facilitate administrative processes, reforms to the Mauritius Society of Authors to better protect intellectual property, and the development of the creative industry as an emerging pillar of our national economy.

In parallel, the digital transformation of Mauritius, through our national innovation agenda offers new opportunities for artists to access global markets through digital platforms, creative technologies, and virtual exhibitions.

In this spirit, Government has already taken important steps to structure dialogue and engagement within the sector, notably through the Convention Nationale sur les Arts et la Culture (Assises des Arts et de la Culture) in the Visual Arts sector, held by the Ministry of Arts and Culture in September 2025.

The Le Morne Cultural Landscape project, with its digital storytelling component unveiled in February 2026, demonstrates how culture and heritage can be harnessed to educate, connect generations, and preserve collective memory.

Through the integration of heritage and digital innovation - supported by partners including the Mauritius Film Development Corporation and aligned with UNESCO perspectives - it ensures that this history remains accessible to young people and communities beyond the site itself.

And this evening’s event marks another step in our broader national effort - bringing together partners, ideas, and opportunities to further

position arts and culture as a driver of inclusion, engagement, development, and sustainable growth.

State House Initiatives

At State House, we have also sought to give tangible expression to this vision.

Through “Painting the Seeds of Hope”, held in December in collaboration with the Committee for the Promotion of National Unity and the NGO Roots Arts, we brought together children from all backgrounds and corners of our Republic - Mauritius, Rodrigues, Agalega, and the Chagossian community -alongside children with disabilities, for painting and art therapy.

This was followed by cultural performances that reflected the power of the arts in fostering national unity.

The “Paint the Seeds of Hope” project will now become an annual initiative throughout my mandate, using the Presidency as a continuing platform to promote empowerment, equity, inclusion, expression, and unity through Arts and Culture, in full alignment with Sustainable Development Goals.

Fixing African Narratives

Distinguished Guests,

For too long, Africa has been spoken about, rather than spoken by. Too often, its story has been reduced, simplified, or confined to a narrow frame.

Africa's narrative is not singular. It is rich, diverse, and evolving. And African art and culture give voice to this narrative.

Through music, literature, visual arts, film, language, food, and fashion, Africa tells its own story - rooted in identity, heritage, resistance, resilience and creativity.

As reflected in global perspectives on African culture, these expressions are not only artistic - they shape dialogue, influence global trends, and contribute to social and economic development.

Today, African creative industries: from film and music to fashion and digital arts, are gaining unprecedented global visibility, reinforcing the continent's role as a major cultural force.

Africa is not on the margins - it is at the centre of global cultural life. Africa is not only yesterday. Africa is today. And Africa is tomorrow.

As a nation at the crossroads of civilisations, Mauritius fully understands what it means to carry multiple narratives within one identity.

In this regard, strengthening our Afro-Malagasy connections and deepening our cultural ties are essential to affirming our place within the broader African story.

Arts and culture - through technology, innovation, and new platforms - offer powerful tools to bring our narratives to life, to reach younger generations, and to connect across borders.

We must therefore invest - not only in artistic creations, but also in our creators, our institutions, and our cultural ecosystems, as well as distribution, visibility, and cultural entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

Let us therefore come together to ensure that arts and culture continue to shape, strengthen, and give voice to our true, shared narratives.

As President of the Republic, I reaffirm my commitment to advancing arts and culture as a strategic pillar for unity, inclusion, economic development, and international influence.

On this forward-looking note, allow me to thank and commend the organisers and participants once again for this laudable initiative.

I wish the Mauritius Art and Culture Investment Summit fruitful deliberations, and I shall be very attentive to its outcomes.

Thank you.