



## **SPEECH**

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

**EVENT: LAUNCH OF COMPASSION UNITES CROSS  
SECTOR ALLIANCE FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN  
MAURITIUS**

**VENUE: STATE HOUSE**

**DATE: 08 JULY 2026**

**TIME: 13:00 HOURS**

## **Protocol**

Dr the Honourable Mahend Gungapersad, Minister of Education and Human Resource,

Dr Ishan Shivanand, Founder of Compassion Unites and the UIH Foundation;

Distinguished representatives of Ministries and Public Institutions;

Distinguished representatives of Private Sector Organisations;

Members of Civil Society Organisations;

Respected Faith and Community Leaders;

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All Protocols Observed.

## **Introduction**

Good afternoon and welcome to State House.

It gives me great pleasure to host you for the launch of the **Compassion Unites - Cross Sector Alliance for Mental Health in Mauritius**, and for what I hope will be a sincere, thoughtful and constructive dialogue on one of the defining challenges of our time: mental health and human wellbeing.

Dr. Ishan Shivanand, we are delighted to welcome you back to Mauritius and once again to State House.

Earlier today, officials of the Presidency and other guests participated in a meditation and mindfulness session led by Dr. Shivanand.

This was not the first time that such a moment of reflection and mindfulness has taken place at State House.

Almost one year ago, in July 2025, Dr. Shivanand and his team paid me a courtesy visit at State House, where we reflected on the importance of strengthening mental resilience and promoting holistic approaches to wellbeing.

A mindfulness session with our staff at that time provided an opportunity for honest reflection and reinforced the importance of caring for our mental and emotional wellbeing-a central preoccupation for most societies.

### **Context and Polycrisis**

Today, the world faces what many describe as a **polycrisis**.

Climate change. Economic uncertainty. Rapid technological transformation. Substance abuse. Gender-based violence. Conflicts and wars, among others.

These challenges increasingly manifest themselves through anxiety, stress, depression, burnout and emotional distress - in workplaces, schools, communities.

### **Mauritius is not immune.**

More than 100,000 people on our island are affected by mental health conditions or substance-use disorders.

Our prisons also face significant challenges, with a large proportion of detainees being young adults, having high rates of chemical dependency, and mental health pressures affecting both inmates, officers and families.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These challenges are known.

Policies have been adopted. Awareness campaigns continue to grow.

However, we must ask ourselves an important question:

**Have our collective responses evolved at the same pace as the challenges confronting our society?**

### **Institutions and initiatives**

Institutions alone, however effective, cannot rebuild the sense of belonging and connection that many people have lost in an increasingly complex and connected world of social media.

And perhaps this is the greatest paradox of our time: technology can connect us instantly, yet we continue to experience loneliness on an unprecedented scale.

**This is why physical and mental wellbeing must become a shared responsibility.**

And this is where the role and responsibility of everyone present in this room today becomes essential.

It is in this spirit that the State House has since, continued to encourage initiatives that promote a holistic approach to wellbeing among its staff members.

We have hosted activities such as Tai Chi sessions, demonstrations in Kyokushin Karate, and, in collaboration with the High Commission of India, we recently organised the first-ever yoga session as part of the International Day of Yoga.

While addressing the National Conference on Mental Wellbeing last year, I highlighted that mental health is not only a healthcare concern; it is a major nation-building issue.

More recently, during the International Council Meeting of Religions for Peace, I emphasised that faith, science, public institutions and communities must work together as partners to respond effectively to the challenges of our time.

**These initiatives may appear modest, but they reflect an important principle: wellbeing is cultivated through consistent practices that strengthen the body, calm the mind and nurture resilience.**

### **Compassion Unites - Cross Sector Alliance**

That is why Mauritius is honoured to become one of the countries where this cross-sector alliance now takes root, following the successful introduction of Compassion Unites in the UK, including at the House of Commons, and in South Africa.

This is particularly meaningful for our Republic, which has always demonstrated that dialogue, mutual respect, unity in diversity and resilience are among our greatest strengths.

I believe there could have been no better way to begin today's discussions.

It is therefore fitting that an initiative founded on the principle of bringing people together for the common good, should begin its journey here at State House.

Today's mindfulness session served as a timely reminder that meaningful dialogue begins with inner reflection.

We live in a world that constantly demands speed, productivity and permanent connectivity. Yet, we must create moments and platforms for reflection, presence and listening.

Meaningful dialogue begins with the recognition that no single institution, profession or individual possesses all the solutions to the challenges before us.

Today's gathering therefore forms part of a broader journey that the Presidency has sought to encourage since the beginning of my mandate.

It is this spirit of partnership that must guide today's conversations.

### **Champions of Compassion**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a few days' time, on 11 July, Mauritius will witness an important milestone, with the **Champions of Compassion** event at the Côte d'Or National Sports Complex.

**This first-of-its-kind championship in our country seeks to highlight the importance of mental health and resilience through sport and competition.**

Beyond being a world-class Kun Khmer championship bringing together talented athletes, this initiative carries a deeper message:

Resilience is not built only during moments of crisis.

It is developed through discipline, purpose and consistent daily practice.

Sport teaches perseverance, emotional control under pressure, self-confidence and the courage to continue despite adversity.

Qualities that are essential in all aspects of life.

I am particularly pleased to note that this event will be open to everyone, free of charge, and designed as a family-friendly national event.

I also welcome the vision shared by Dr. Shivanand, that this initiative should go beyond recognising champions inside the ring.

The ambition is to create pathways of continued support through mentorship, scholarships and opportunities that allow participants to develop their potential and become **Compassion Champions**.

In this regard, I wish to pay tribute to one of Mauritius' finest sporting ambassadors, Ranini Cundasawmy, who will also be part of this event.

**As a multiple-time World Champion in Muay Thai and Kun Khmer, she has proudly represented Mauritius on the international stage.**

Yet, her greatest contribution extends beyond her victories.

Through her commitment to providing free training and mentoring to women and children in her community, she has demonstrated that true champions are defined by the lives they inspire and the communities they help to strengthen.

Her journey reflects the very philosophy behind Compassion Unites: that those who receive support and opportunities can, in turn, become a source of encouragement and guidance for others.

I also wish to commend the artists, organisers, partners, athletes, volunteers and all participants who are contributing to making this event a success.

### **State House as a Partner**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As President of the Republic, I do not formulate public policy or exercise executive powers.

But since assuming office, I have sought to reaffirm State House as the House of the People.

Shouldering an important responsibility: to bring people together, listen to citizens and create spaces where ideas serving the national interest can emerge.

The Presidency does **not** seek to replace the important work already carried out by Ministries, professionals and organisations across the country.

Rather, it seeks to **complement** these efforts by encouraging partnerships, facilitating dialogue and strengthening the bonds of trust that unite our society.

Today's gathering must therefore be an opportunity for all of us to explore how, collectively, we can build a more compassionate and resilient Mauritius.

### **Concluding Remarks**

My sincere hope is that today's gathering must mark the beginning of a sustained national conversation and a stronger culture of compassion, resilience and collective responsibility.

I commend the Compassion Unites team, the organisers, partners and all those present today once again for their commitment, dedication and contribution to advancing a vision where mental wellbeing, resilience and compassion become integral elements of our national development.

Because ultimately, the strength of a nation is not measured only by its economic achievements or physical development, but also by the wellbeing of its people.

Indeed, the true wealth of a nation lies not only in what it builds, but in how it cares for its people.

**This is the Mauritius we must continue to build together.**

**As One People, As One Nation, and As One Humanity,**

With these words, I now open the floor for today's Cross-Sector Conversation.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.

May God bless our Republic.

Thank you.