



SPEECH

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

**EVENT: OPENING OF 16TH INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
 OF GOPIO**

VENUE: HUMAN SERVICE TRUST, CALEBASSES

DATE: 11 SEPTEMBER 2026

TIME: 17:00 HOURS

Honourable Ministers,

The former Vice-President of the Republic, Mr. Raouf Bundhun,

Her Excellency Mrs. Aparna Ganesan, Deputy High Commissioner of India,

His Excellency Mr. Rabin Gungoo, High Commissioner of Mauritius to Malaysia,

Honourable Members of the National Assembly,

Mr. Chundraprakash (Vinay) Dussoye, Deputy President of GOPIO International and President of GOPIO Mauritius,

Mr. A. Ravendiran Arjunan, Secretary General of GOPIO International,

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening.

It is a particular pleasure for Mauritius to host the 16th GOPIO International Convention and to extend a warm and cordial welcome to delegates gathered here from every corner of the globe.

This Convention, taking place from 11 to 13 September 2026, brings together diaspora leaders, entrepreneurs, professionals, academics, youth representatives and policymakers from across the world.

It is a fitting reflection of GOPIO's longstanding commitment to connecting People of Indian Origin and promoting cooperation across borders.

At the outset, I wish to commend GOPIO International, GOPIO Mauritius, and all partners for bringing together this extraordinary global network.

Founded in 1989, GOPIO has grown into a non-sectarian international organisation representing and connecting People of Indian Origin across some 100 countries.

Its mission of promoting the well-being and socio-economic advancement of the global PIO community gives particular significance to this gathering in Mauritius.

I also express my sincere appreciation to the High Commission of India for its unwavering contribution to strengthening the longstanding ties between India and Mauritius, and for consistently fostering connections with the wider Indian diaspora.

The theme of this year's Convention, "Connected Beyond Borders, Shared Common Culture and Strengthening Global Network," carries a profound resonance in Mauritius.

Our national story has been forged by migration, slavery, indenture, and successive journeys across the Indian Ocean. People arrived carrying distinct histories, languages, traditions, and aspirations.

Over generations, these diverse influences intersected to form the bedrock of one united Mauritian nation, living together as one people and as one nation-celebrating Unity in Diversity

This lived journey gives Mauritius a unique perspective on diaspora dynamics, identity, and belonging.

Roots, identity and belonging

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My own relationship with India is both personal and intellectual. I had the privilege of completing my formative studies at the University of Delhi.

In March 2025, during the official visit of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to Mauritius, my wife and I were deeply touched to receive our OCI cards from his hands.

Earlier this year, I had another meaningful opportunity to reconnect with India when I travelled to Andhra Pradesh as Chief Guest at the 3rd World Telugu Conference in Guntur, where I met with the Honourable N. Chandrababu Naidu, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh.

These personal experiences reaffirm that relations between countries are sustained not only through formal institutions, but through cultural memory, personal experiences, and enduring human, people-to-people connections.

This question of roots and belonging has continually informed my recent public engagements.

At the Intercontinental Slavery Museum in February, I reflected on the story of slaves like Anna de Bengale, whose life was brought to wider attention through the research of young historian Joël Edouard.

Her story reminds us of how much remains to be discovered and understood about the people, their roots and journeys that shaped our island

Our history cannot, therefore, be understood through isolated narratives. It has always been one of encounters, movements, and exchanges between people and cultures.

This perspective has also informed my engagement with the Organisation for Diaspora Initiatives and with literary works such as *Return to My Nest* by author Mrs. Ranjita Bunwaree and *The Mandhvi Connection* by Professor Goolam Mohamedbhai.

Earlier this year, I also had the honour of delivering the Annual Tagore Memorial Lecture at the Rabindranath Tagore Institute on “Reclaiming the Human in Tagore’s Vision.”

Tagore was deeply rooted in Indian culture while remaining genuinely open to the wider world.

His understanding of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam- “the world is one family”- recognized cultural diversity without allowing difference to become a barrier to our shared humanity.

His thinking reminds us that unity does not require uniformity, and that cultural identity can coexist with openness to others.

From multiculturalism to interculturalism

This distinction holds particular relevance today.

Migration has become one of the defining global issues of our time.

People move across borders for work, education, security, and opportunity, even as many societies face deepening identity-based divisions and renewed forms of xenophobia.

Mauritius is not immune to these wider currents.

Yet, migration is also deeply embedded in our own national experience, it is the very story through which Mauritius became the country it is today.

Our responsibility is therefore not simply to manage diversity or ensure peaceful coexistence, but to cultivate the conditions for genuine interaction, dialogue, and a stronger sense of belonging to a common society.

This is where the distinction between multiculturalism and interculturalism becomes meaningful.

Multiculturalism recognizes the presence and value of different cultures; interculturalism places greater emphasis on active dialogue and engagement between them.

For a diverse society such as Mauritius, this interaction is essential to consolidating our shared national identity.

As President of the Republic, nation-building is central to my mission.

This requires us to understand the different histories that have shaped us while strengthening the common identity that brings us together.

It is particularly important that our young people know the history of their country- not simply as a collection of dates and events, but as a complex and evolving story that they inherit and have a responsibility to shape.

Understanding our past gives each generation the perspective to engage more intelligently with the present and make informed choices for the future.

From Diaspora to Contribution

This is also precisely where the role of a global diaspora network becomes important.

Diaspora connections are rooted in heritage and memory, but they must also facilitate knowledge exchange, professional collaboration, investment, innovation, and cultural cooperation.

This is very much in keeping with GOPIO's broader mission: to harness the strength of the Global PIO network for economic, educational and cultural cooperation, and to transform connections into opportunities for collective progress.

From religion and culture to music, language, literature, science and the arts, Mauritius bears the imprint of the diverse traditions and contributions of people of Indian origin.

This is visible not only in our social and cultural life, but also in the very landscape of our country.

We see it in the names of our institutions and public spaces - from Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam and Anjalay Coopen to Dr Idrice Goomany and many others whose lives and contributions have become part of our national memory.

These are not simply names. They reflect the many individuals whose contributions have helped shape the Mauritius we know today.

Convention Agenda

The Convention's four major tracks- Business, Youth, Academic and Socio-cultural, are particularly relevant because they translate the idea of diaspora connectivity into concrete areas of cooperation.

The Academic Pillar promotes rigorous research and the exchange of knowledge across borders.

The Socio-Cultural Pillar connects heritage, language, literature, and the arts vibrantly with contemporary life.

The Youth Pillar brings a new generation into these networks, giving young leaders the agency to shape their future.

The Business Pillar unlocks opportunities for entrepreneurship, investment, professional networks, and cross-border innovation.

Together, these four pillars can help move the global PIO conversation from heritage to partnership, from networking to collaboration, and from shared identity to shared contribution.

I therefore welcome GOPIO International's willingness to work with the Government of Mauritius and relevant institutions to further consolidate Mauritius' position as a PIO Capital, and to explore long-term initiatives that can give practical meaning to this role.

The Convention itself describes Mauritius as the "PIO Capital of the World", reflecting the special place our country occupies in the history and continuing evolution of the global Indian diaspora.

The proposals put forward - including a global PIO center, leadership and youth programs, stronger business and investment networks, heritage and cultural initiatives, and greater cooperation between India,

Mauritius, and PIO communities worldwide- offer compelling avenues for future collaboration.

Crucially, they seek to translate connections into active knowledge-sharing, youth leadership, entrepreneurship, and institutional cooperation.

Connected beyond borders

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, technology has made communication across borders easier than ever before.

Yet, meaningful connections require more than communication; they demand sustained engagement, an exchange of ideas, and a genuine willingness to learn from different human experiences.

This is particularly relevant to GOPIO, which brings together People of Indian Origin across countries and generations.

Its international network is intended not merely to preserve a common heritage, but also to create platforms for collaboration in education, business, culture, innovation and community development.

A shared heritage provides an important point of connection, while the distinct national experiences of diaspora communities enrich the network.

Mauritius stands ready to contribute meaningfully to this exchange.

Our own experience demonstrates that different journeys, traditions, and cultural influences can become part of a common national story while retaining their distinctiveness.

Youth and a Shared Future

I am especially pleased that the *Youth forms one of the four foundational pillars* of this Convention.

Young people today are coming of age in a world shaped by artificial intelligence, digital transformation, global mobility, and rapid social change. They need both a firm understanding of their roots and the confidence to engage boldly with the wider world.

The GOPIO Youth Conference places emphasis on leadership, innovation, entrepreneurship, career development and global networks, precisely the areas in which young people can become agents of positive change.

This is why initiatives connecting young people across countries, cultures, and disciplines are so valuable. Connecting our youth to history matters greatly to nation-building.

A generation that understands the journeys, struggles, and contributions that shaped its country is far better placed to appreciate both its diversity and its common identity.

At the same time, the critical challenges facing societies increasingly cross-national boundaries: from climate change and technological disruption to migration, economic uncertainty, and geopolitical tensions. They require cooperation that goes beyond individual countries and communities.

The Indian diaspora itself demonstrates how identity can travel across borders, adapt to different societies, and remain connected to a shared heritage.

Mauritius represents one particular expression of that global experience.

Our national identity has been shaped by different migrations and encounters, which over time have contributed to a shared Mauritian belonging.

This experience does not make us immune to division, but it gives us a valuable perspective on building unity while respecting diversity-*As One People, As One Nation*, as enshrined in our National Anthem.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of this Convention invites us to think beyond geographical borders and consider what connects us across them.

For Mauritius, this conversation is profoundly meaningful because our national story is inseparable from migration, cultural exchange, and the gradual creation of a shared identity.

As we look ahead, we have an opportunity to build on these connections through knowledge, culture, youth engagement, business cooperation, and stronger institutional links.

The real measure of a diaspora network is not simply how well it remembers its past, but how effectively it uses that shared heritage to build a better future.

I welcome GOPIO International's willingness to further consolidate its engagement with Mauritius, and I look forward to the possibilities that will emerge from closer cooperation between GOPIO, the Government, relevant Mauritian institutions, and the wider global PIO community.

It is my hope that your deliberations will deepen existing relationships and strengthen the enduring networks that connect people across borders and generations.

May this Convention therefore be more than a celebration of our common heritage.

May it become a platform for new partnerships, new ideas, and new opportunities for our young people and for the communities we represent.

On this note, I officially declare the **16th GOPIO International Convention open.**

Thank you.