

Republic of Mauritius

Ms Thompson-Barrow, Director Law Development Section of the
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Division of the Commonwealth
Secretariats

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all on behalf of the Attorney-General's office to the opening of this Commonwealth seminar on the implementation of International Environmental Instruments and policy development.
2. We welcome the Commonwealth Secretariats' decision for selecting the Republic of Mauritius as the host country for this seminar.

Distinguished Delegates

3. In spite of the fact that more countries have become party to international environmental agreements from 140 agreements in 1993 after Rio to some 500 after Johannesburg World Summit in 2002, the last decade has continued to witness the environment crisis namely ozone layer depletion, climate change through global warming and loss of

biodiversity. Moreover, the findings of the 2002 report on GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK on the state of the global environment showed that –

- (i) Pollutants in the atmosphere are increasing
- (ii) Vast areas of land resources are being degraded
- (iii) Forest areas are still being depleted
- (iv) Biodiversity is under threat
- (v) Marine resources are seriously being exploited

Ladies and Gentlemen

4. The survival of our planet is more than ever resting on the concerted efforts of one and all. As a small island state with a fragile ecosystem and limited resources, the Republic of Mauritius is fully conscious of the fact that individual action towards sustainable development can only work as part of a coordinated international plan of implementation. In this context, Mauritius has continued to support international initiative and in a spirit of international co-operation, has signed some 36 environment related conventions and Protocols.

5. Mauritius has been implementing the obligations of most conventions and protocols through the development of strategies, formulation of policies, implementation of projects through technology transfer and capacity building. The National Environment Strategy (1999) for the decade, the National Development Strategy, (2004) on land use

planning and the Mauritius Strategy (2005), the blueprint for the implementation of Sustainable Development in SIDS are important national guidance documents towards achieving environment sustainability as well as implementing obligations under conventions. Various environmental legislations have been amended, reviewed and promulgated to implement the requirements of the International Environmental Agreements. Progress in each of the conventions has however been achieved at varied levels.

Distinguished Delegates

6. I seize this opportunity to inform you that the Republic of Mauritius has achieved remarkable success in the preservation of the ozone layer. Since the adherence to the Montreal Protocol in 1992, Mauritius has signed all its amendments and has implemented various policies and projects to reduce Chlorofluoro Carbons (CFC) imports from 70 Ozone Depleting Potential (ODP) tons in 1991 to 0 ODP ton in 2005, five years ahead of schedule date of the Montreal Protocol

This remarkable first success story on CFC phase-out in the African region also rests on financial and technical assistance from the Multilateral Fund of the Montreal Protocol as well as the several country-related key factors. These are strong political will, leadership, active coordination, committed stakeholders and strict enforcement of legislation at entry points.

7. Other Core Conventions namely the United Nations Framework on Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Biological Diversity, the

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea require more attention towards building resilience. Though Mauritius is continually reviewing its legislative framework so as to incorporate the provisions of its commitments to these international conventions for their eventual implementation and enforcement, we are faced with immense challenges of expertise, financial and technical resources.

The Government of Mauritius has thus enlisted the implementation of International Environmental agreements in its 2005 -2010 Programme and is making all possible efforts to put in place the pre-requisite to enable compliance with the obligations of all the conventions.

Ladies and Gentlemen

8. The core environmental conventions have much in common especially the biodiversity-related conventions and opportunities exist for closer cooperation in similar clusters. Opportunities exist for International Environmental Agreements to work together in capacity building programmes related to the development of national legislation and other cross-cutting issues that support the implementation of conventions and protocols at the country level. In the same perspective, Government is organising a national workshop in two week's time on Green Customs Initiative to sensitise frontline customs officers on environmentally damaging trade where chemical-related conventions are involved.

9. The seminar as its objective to promote the implementation of the Convention at national level by identifying the gaps in member countries' existing legislative/regulatory arrangements would thus be addressing our

needs. The agenda also include the examination of regional arrangement to develop comprehensive and integrated legislative framework as well as appropriate policy indicators and thus enhance progress.

Distinguished delegates

10. I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Commonwealth Secretariat for funding this capacity building seminar on these important international agreements at this crucial point in time. I also extend my gratitude to the various assistance in many other sectors namely Telecommunications, Science, Health, Tourism, Constitutional Reform, Maritime Boundary Limitation and others being benefited regularly from Commonwealth. The Government of Mauritius is looking forward to continue to work together in the same or even better spirit of collaboration in the future.

11. International Cooperation is viewed as an important ingredient in the overall development strategy of Mauritius to achieve sustainable development. Besides being party to a number of bilateral, regional or international agreements, Mauritius also belongs to blocs like COMESA, SADC, IOC, and NEPAD. Thus, various bilateral agreements in differing sectors like environmental protection, finance, trade or forestry exist with neighbouring member African countries. One of the recent initiatives worth mentioning here is on the UNEP project on National Legal Databases for capacity building to enhance access to environment law information in Africa where Mauritius is also involved. Thus, Government officials, legal practitioners, environmental managers, among others in the

African region will have access to environmental law information needed for developing and implementing the legal tools that promote sound environment management.

12. My wish is therefore to emphasise the spirit of further co-operation on International Environment Instruments among the African countries in the region. I am confident that during the 7 days work there will be common understanding on issues on the agenda and you will come to conclusions that are beneficial to our common objective:

Distinguished Guests

13. I wish you all fruitful deliberations and I now declare this seminar on the implementation of the International Environmental Instruments and policy development in the African region officially open.

Thank YOU

J.V