

**National Workshop: Planning and Launch of the project  
for the development of an Intellectual Property and  
Branding Strategy for dodo handicrafts in Mauritius**

**22 May 2019, 09.30hrs – Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel**

**Opening statement by the Minister of Business, Enterprise and  
Cooperatives, Hon. Soomilduth Bholah**

**His Excellency Yoshiharu Kato, Ambassador of Japan to Mauritius,**

**Ms Loretta Asiedu, Senior Counsellor, Regional Bureau for Africa,  
World Intellectual Property Organization,**

**Mr Getachew Mengistie Alemu, Intellectual Property expert,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am delighted to be in your midst this morning to launch the second phase of the project for the development of an Intellectual Property (IP) and Branding Strategy for dodo handicrafts in Mauritius.

The IP and Branding project is being organized by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in collaboration with my Ministry and the Japan Patent Office, under the Japan Funds-in-Trust.

It is my pleasure to welcome Ms *Loretta Asiedu* and Mr *Getachew Mengistie Alemu* who are not new to Mauritius since they were here last year for the initial phase of this meaningful project for Mauritius.

Allow me, **Ladies and Gentlemen**, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius, to express our sincere gratitude to WIPO and the Government of Japan for their technical support and assistance.

We are intent upon protecting and consolidating the IP rights of our craftsmen in the Handicraft industry, for therein lies, to a great extent, the prosperity of the sector. We are also committed to strengthening our partnership with WIPO and to pursuing our friendly ties with Japan in the area.

***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

In this digital world, even the simple act of picking a handicraft makes us feel connected to people. And here I would like to quote a statement from the Indian author, *Vandana Shiva*: “*The fact that I still find so much beauty in a handicraft is because my mother taught us to see not just the craft as a product but the craft as an embodiment of human creativity and human labor*” – Unquote. This is why craft feels so different from industrial production.

The handicraft sector in all its myriad forms and expressions is an important element of a destination’s uniqueness and appeal. It is evocative of the local history, culture and tradition. Crafts are considered as memory exported from the destination following a visit. No wonder the handicraft sector is of undeniable importance

for the tourism sector, which is itself one of the greatest revenue providers of the country.

We tend to forget that our entrepreneurs generate intellectual property assets while producing their crafts and making them distinctive. Many entrepreneurs do not adequately protect the IP assets which they generate during their production and value chain. This is very unfortunate and there is need to foster understanding that such resources have tremendous commercial value.

In the absence of such understanding, similar low-quality and cheap products – *which are not produced in Mauritius* – are marketed and sold as Mauritian products. According to an estimation made by representatives of local craft manufacturers, more than Rs 200 million of handicraft products are imported annually. This ability of suppliers to provide imported inexpensive crafts has severely impacted and diminished business opportunities for local craftsmen, both threatening the livelihoods of the artisans and the viability of the sector. At the same time, this situation causes a lot of prejudice to our image as well as to the repute of authentic Mauritian crafts.

Government has decided to address those challenges with resolve. It is determined to restore to the Handicrafts industry the pride that it legitimately deserves. One of the major steps taken by my Ministry and SME Mauritius Ltd last year has been the introduction of holograms. The hologram is an intellectual property of SME Mauritius Ltd and is used as a tool for recognizing genuine, local and high quality products of the SMEs in the country. It also acts as

an identifier with an already registered logo and high security features. The label cannot be duplicated.

We are always seeking for ways to protect and consolidate our handicraft sector. Today's national workshop provides an opportune platform to discuss and to adopt a work program for the branding strategy development and implementation for dodo handicrafts.

Being part of our coat of arms, the dodo bird is emblematic of Mauritius. The dodo is a constant feature across the country, be it in markets, at the airport and in the textile industry.

### ***Distinguished Guests,***

From a trade perspective we usually talk about the power of branding. This is all about having a clearly defined approach to protect and promote trade in goods or trade in services, in both the value and supply chain.

You may recall that the IP and Branding project is one of the recommendations of our National Intellectual Property Development Plan – which was prepared by Mr Getachew Alemu, with the technical assistance of WIPO as far back as in 2017.

The aim is to develop and implement intellectual property and branding tools to capture intangible values associated to the distinctive characteristics of locally manufactured goods.

In the case of dodo crafts, branding will be used to improve the business competitiveness of Mauritian-made dodo products. We will thus, capture the goodwill and reputation of our dodo handicrafts.

We need such a strategy as a marketing tool to secure more exports and sales of dodo crafts and hence, generate higher revenue and create more jobs for our people. The benefits are numerous.

This will improve the standard of living of our entrepreneurs and their families. Moreover, it will provide them with a sense of security so necessary to unleash their true artistic talents.

Designing an Intellectual Property and Branding strategy for dodo crafts will bring IP assets identification and protection capacity in the sector. A branding strategy will thus reinforce consumers' trust in dodo crafts and trust will be a crucial component in the success of our policy.

Owing to these reasons, Government is determined to promote an entrepreneurial culture and to address the main problem faced by our local handicrafts sector, namely the illicit use or sale of products and assets of Mauritius.

***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

Mauritius is endowed with a list of distinctive products that may be marketed using brands in both the handicrafts and agricultural sectors.

Dodo crafts have been taken for the purpose of the pilot IP and branding project. During the first phase, two other products had been selected, namely rum and special sugar.

My Ministry has given the opportunity to stakeholders involved in those two sectors, to take part in such a forum and learn from the strategy which is being designed for dodo crafts.

We should use the experience that is being gained in the process of implementing intellectual property and branding strategy of dodo products in branding local rum and special sugar. Boosting the protection of the Handicrafts sector means boosting the economic well-being of our countrymen dependent upon that sector.

With these words, I am pleased to officially launch the National Workshop to plan the project for the development of an Intellectual Property and Branding Strategy for dodo handicrafts in Mauritius.

I thank you for your kind attention.

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