

Speech by H.E. OSKAR BENEDIKT
Ambassador of the European Union to the Republic of
Mauritius and to the Republic of Seychelles

Rodrigues Airport Development Project

Monday 23rd September at 16.30
Le Sirius, Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel
Port-Louis

- **Honourable Dr Renganaden Padayachy, Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, and Development;**
- **Mr. Franceau Aubret Grancourt, G.O.S.K, Chief Commissioner Rodrigues Regional Assembly;**
- **H.E. Mr. Albert Camille Vital, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps;**
- **Mrs Claudia Conceicao, Regional Director, International Finance Corporation;**
- **Mrs Idah Pswarayi-Riddihough, World Bank Country Director for Mozambique, Madagascar, Mauritius, Comoros and Seychelles;**
- **Mr Sjamsu Rahardja, Resident Representative of the World Bank;**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps;**
- **Governor of the Bank of Mauritius;**

- **Representatives of Development Partners;**

- **Distinguished guests; I would also like to greet Mr Johnson Roussety Deputy Chief Commissioner, and Mr Jean Claude Pierre Louis Island Chief Executive;**

- **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

All Protocols observed.

It is an honour and a pleasure to address you today, at this very important event marking an important step in the relationship between the Republic of Mauritius and the European Union.

The European Union through a grant of more than 799, 000,000 (seven hundred and ninety-nine million) Rupees will contribute to the financing of the Rodrigues Airport Development project; the biggest and one of the most strategic national projects carried out so far in Rodrigues. A development that will be a game changer in the economic landscape of the island.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This strategic and important project will improve the air connectivity of Rodrigues with mainland Mauritius and with the region. An efficient and safe air connectivity will have a direct positive impact on the Tourism sector (Tourism is the pillar of the economy) and on cargo traffic. This in turn will support the economy, and contribute to sustainable growth and job creation.

That is why the European Union responded favourably to the request of the Government of Mauritius to support the project. Our commitment to the project dates back to year 2019, when the European Union grant was approved by Brussels. However, the implementation of the project was put on hold for a while owing to some unexpected problems (amongst which the COVID Pandemic) encountered along the way. Despite these problems, the European Union remained committed to the project, as we believe that this development is important and necessary for the prosperity of Rodrigues. And, we have worked hand in hand with the Government, leaving no stone unturned, to put the project back on track with the support of the World Bank. I seize this opportunity to thank the World Bank, which has responded favourably and quickly to the request of both the Government and the EU to participate in the funding of the project, making it possible for the project to continue.

The European Union together with the World Bank will provide a total fund of 9 billion Rupees through a blending facility combining loan from the bank and grant from the EU to finance the Airport project and to support the following sectors: Tourism, Water/Waste Water, Agriculture, Fisheries, and Small and Medium Enterprises. The European Union grant will be managed by the World Bank, through an Administration Agreement.

The European Union and World Bank share common values and through our partnership, we have over the years implemented development projects across the world.

Both the European Union and the World Bank have strict Environmental standards and regulations that are applicable to the projects we finance. And, we are particularly vigilant in Rodrigues.

That is why the choice of the design was based not only on technical but also on environmental considerations. We have also ensured that a full Environmental and Social Impact Assessment study was carried out; the population, NGOs and Civil Societies in Rodrigues were consulted on this important aspect of the project. We will ensure that the Environmental and Social Management Plan is implemented, and I am confident that the Authorities will also ensure a close monitoring of the Plan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Airport development will undoubtedly bring important benefits to the island. However, we must ensure that the development is carried out in line with a long-term vision, which will blend environmental and social objectives with economic considerations.

That is why the European Union felt that it was necessary for Rodrigues to have an updated Sustainable Integrated Development Plan (SIDPR) that will provide this long-term strategy integrating economic sustainability, environment sustainability and social sustainability, and we decided to provide a Technical Assistance Facility to the tune of 27 (twenty seven) million Rupees for the study. Eight priority areas were covered in the Strategy, they were namely: (i) Water (Sustainable water production and distribution), (ii) Environment (Sustainable use and conservation of environmental and natural resources), (iii) Climate Change, (iv) Sustainable

Tourism, (v) Sustainable Agriculture, (vi) Blue Economy, (vii) Energy (Renewable Energies and Energy Efficiency), and (viii) Private Sector development and Small and Medium Enterprises. The 10-year Strategy was accompanied by a 5-year costed action plan defining the actions for each of the 8 priority sectors. An updated Sustainable Tourism Master Plan, a Physical Development Strategy Plan and a Land Use Plan were also part of the study. And, evidently, the water sector was considered as the priority of the priorities. The Strategy has been adopted by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and it is now important to ensure its timely implementation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Union has been supporting projects and initiatives in Rodrigues for the past 19 years, and has worked with the Authorities, Civil Societies and NGOs, and covering a wide range of fields ranging from girls and women health and empowerment, water, conservation of the biodiversity, Disaster response management to sustainable fishing and health security.

Our actions in Rodrigues started in 2005 with the ‘Decentralised Cooperation Programme’, where we worked with civil societies to tackle poverty, inequalities and promote maternal health and education.

In 2010, we provided support to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to develop the Water Sector, through construction of Desalination plant, provision of rain harvesting facilities to 1,000 Low Income Households, and rehabilitation of dams.

We have also, through indirect thematic programmes worked with NGOs in the health sector: running medical camp on matters related to women's Health and have provided medical equipment for persons with disabilities.

We are currently supporting the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation for the reforestation of 2 nature reserves (Grande Montagne and Anse Quitor). 150 000 trees (endemic and local species) will be planted.

We are currently also supporting several NGOs to educate, protect and empower Girls and Women, and to empower youth in general.

Rodrigues is also amongst the Beneficiaries of the EU's regional programmes on Disaster Response Management, Eco-Fish (sustainable fishing) and SEGA-ONE Health (Health Security).

Monsieur le Ministre, Mesdames et Messieurs,

Je voudrais conclure en disant quelques mots sur la coopération République de Maurice – Union Européenne. Cette année nous célébrons les 53 années de notre coopération, un témoignage d'une relation bilatéral solide. Notre soutien au projet Aéroport et au projet développement durable de Rodrigues est la preuve que cette relation est appelé à se renforcer.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.