

# *The Muslim Citizen Council*



## **Memorandum in the Context of**

## **The General Elections 2024**



# *The Muslim Citizen Council*

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(Founded in October 2001 – Shabaan 1422) - Reg. No. 7840



## **Proposed Memorandum in the Context of Forthcoming General Elections 2024**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1 – 1 The Muslim Citizen Council (MCC) is duly registered with the Registrar of Association and its membership is open to all registered Muslim organisations, including Mosques, within the Republic of Mauritius.
- 1 - 2 The MCC takes a keen interest in all human activities and has as its main objective the search for solutions to the various social, economic and political problems affecting the human beings at large, and the Muslim community in particular.
- 1 – 3 In the pursuit of its Mission, the MCC is guided by the universal principles embodied in the Holy Quran, and in the practice and teachings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw), which rest essentially on the respect for human dignity, characterised by mutual understanding and justice.
- 1 - 4 On the eve of the forthcoming General Elections, 2024, the MCC is pleased to make proposals for a better and harmonious Mauritius, where justice and human dignity will prevail.

### **2. DEMOCRACY IN ACTION.**

- 2 – 1 The MCC is proud to belong to the Republic of Mauritius, a sovereign democratic State which guarantees to every citizen, the following fundamental human rights:
  - (a) the right to life, liberty, security of the person and the protection of the law
  - (b) the right to freedom of conscience, of expression, of assembly and association, and the right to establish schools.
  - (c) the right to the protection of the privacy of his home and other property.
  - (d) the right to the protection from deprivation of property without compensation.
  - (e) the right to protection from discrimination by reason of race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex.
- 2 – 2 The MCC further notes that the Constitution, which is the Supreme Law of Mauritius, expressly provides for an in-built mechanism of checks and balances between (i) the Legislature (ii) the Executive and (iii) the Judicature.

### 3. RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL FREEDOM

- 3 – 1 The MCC acknowledges the fact that the citizens of Mauritius, irrespective of their religious faith have always enjoyed freedom, *“either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate their religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observances.”*
- 3 – 2 In the circumstances, the Muslim Community is pleased to express their appreciation that, like any other religious group, they have not been hindered in any manner whatsoever in the observance and practice of their religion.
- 3 – 3 With a view to further promoting peaceful and harmonious relations between the different religious groups co-existing in Mauritius, the MCC urges Political Leaders to combine their efforts with a view to further promoting the religious freedom which has always existed in Mauritius with a view to enabling each religious group to practice their religious practices according to their faith and without any hindrance.
- 3 – 4 The MCC particularly urges Political Leaders to refrain from indulging in activities, either directly or indirectly, which may be perceived as an undue influence of the State in the organization and practice of religious and cultural activities. In this context, Government should rationalise and enhance its policy of subsidy to religious and cultural groups, and in so far as Cultural Centres are concerned, the State control of these centres must be reduced to the essential minimum and Board Members thereof should consist mainly of persons democratically elected among delegates of the relevant lawfully recognised religious and cultural bodies.
- 3 – 5 To further promote the practice of Islam and Islamic Culture, the MCC does make the following proposals:

#### **(i) Halal Food Authority**

To set up a ‘Halal Food Authority,’ that will have powers to ensure that food items offered on sale to consumers, in Super Markets, Stores, Food Outlets, Restaurants and Hotels are genuinely Halal; that will have powers to sue and remove Operating Licenses of the defaulters.

A unit to be set up within the Sanitary Division of the Ministry of Health to ensure that food items are properly labelled with a view to facilitating consumers in their choice between Halal, Vegetarian, Non-Halal, and Non-Vegetarian food items.

#### **(ii) Halal Tourism**

Halal tourism has gained popularity in recent years, as the Muslim travel market has grown significantly, all around the world. Considering that Tourism in Mauritius is a significant economic driver for the island nation, for its stunning beaches, and most importantly its vibrant cultural diversity, all Hotels or/and Bungalows should consider to set up a window for Halal Tourism.

The Halal tourism that will cater to the specific needs and preferences of Muslim travelers, adhering to Islamic principles and values, should be promoted. This will provide services and amenities that are in accordance with Islamic beliefs, Islamic etiquette, ensuring that Muslim travelers can enjoy their vacations while observing their religious obligations.

### **(iii) Islamic Cultural Museum**

Museum plays a crucial role in the conservation of cultural heritage, and educational outreach. In this respect, the MCC would appreciate if government considers the possibility of implementing the project of an 'Islamic Cultural Museum'. This museum will promote the various aspects of the Islamic culture and also highlight the fundamental difference between religion and culture. In the process, it will contribute to a better understanding of Islam to non-Muslim citizens.

### **(iv) Muslim Family Council**

The MCC recognises that the Muslim Family Council is doing its best, as far as possible. However, it is of opinion that the MFC 'should be revamped' in order to be more effective and deliver expected results.

Its yearly budget should be increased considerably; its office uplifted and additional human resources be added, so as to offer a better service. to the Muslim community

### **(v) Arabic language**

The MCC notes with concern that the teaching Arabic languages does not receive the same consideration from the relevant authorities as that given to the other oriental languages. The teaching of Arabic language is still lagging behind when compared to the teaching of other languages. The MCC therefore appeals to government to explore ways and means to promote and enhance the teaching of Arabic language and to offer a headquarters for the Arabic Speaking Union as has been granted to other similar Speaking Unions. Furthermore, the MCC recommends airtime for an Arabic language channel at the MBC.

In this respect, the MCC wish to see effective and efficient policy towards the teaching of Arabic languages and Urdu language at all levels from primary to tertiary education.

### **(vi) The Islamic Cultural Centre**

The organization of Hajj meets with a myriad of problems, each year. The ICC, which operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Arts and Culture with its 'hit and miss' strategies has failed lamentably in the organization of one of the fundamental practices of Islam.

Therefore, the MCC recommends the setting up of a statutory body, under the PMO of the government of the Republic, a 'HAJJ AUTHORITY', which will be responsible to organize all stages from start till the completion of the Islamic pilgrimages. The HAJJ AUTHORITY will consist of High Officials Civil Servants, Islamic Scholars and NGO members.

The Islamic Cultural Centre should be relieved of its regulatory functions in matters connected with the supervision and organization of Hajj and thus could concentrate on its other important objectives, namely to preserve and promote Islamic arts and culture; the study of Arabic and Urdu; to collect, publish and disseminate valuable information pertaining to Islamic Art and Culture through the establishment of educational and welfare institutions; to organise lectures, seminars, workshop, exhibitions and any other activities which will lead to a better understanding of Islamic arts and culture; etc..

### **(vii) Sexuality Education**

Sexuality Education is an important part of 'Life Skills and Values (LSV). In this respect, the MCC would appreciate that Islamic values are preserved regarding the teaching materials and the teaching of Sex

Education in schools. Further, the MCC recommends Islamic Scholars to participate in the developing of Curriculum and syllabus on Sexuality Education.

**(viii) Regulate import of livestock for Eid-ul-Adha**

Each year, the Commerce Minister announces the price of kilo of cattle on the hoof, prior to the Eid-ul-Adha. Always, the Ministry declares a higher price in contrast to the normal price, without any explanation or logic. In spite of the fixed price, importers increased their prices considerably, using all kind of trade tricks.

The MCC avers that the Government should solely for Eid-ul-Adha, consider importing and distributing cattle on the hoof, through the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Mauritius Meat Authority, and/or State Trading Corporation.

**(ix) Waqf Board**

The Waqf Board was established in 1941 and has been operating since then according to rules and regulations which need to be updated. The MCC feels that the whole concept of Waqf be reviewed/revamped and also the Board composition be done according to Islamic criteria.

**(x) Islamic Banking**

Islamic banking, which operates in accordance with the principles of Shariah law, has grown significantly over the past few decades. It is now a substantial part of the global financial system, especially in Muslim-majority countries, and is gaining popularity in non-Muslim countries. Islamic banking is a major segment of the broader Islamic finance industry. In 2023, the global Islamic finance industry is estimated to be worth over 3 trillion USD. Islamic banks represent about 70-80% of this figure.

Therefore, the MCC encourages that the Government to open a window of Islamic Banking in every bank, where the government has a considerable number of shares and to incite other commercial banks to follow suit.

**(xi) Muslim Personal Law**

The Muslim Personal Law refers to the body of laws, namely Marriage and Divorce, Inheritance, that governs the personal matters of individuals who follow Islam. Therefore, the MCC suggest that the government consider to re-introduce appropriate legislation for its official recognition and implementation. In some countries, Muslim Personal Law have been integrated into the national legal system, while in others, it may operate alongside a secular legal framework.

**(x) The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)**

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which aims to foster unity and cooperation among its 57-member states, primarily from the Muslim world, is an international organization founded in 1969.

Its mission is to enhance collaboration in various fields, including politics, economics, culture, and social affairs. The MCC considers that Mauritius can benefit from exchange from the OIC, in the field of Human Rights Development, Culture and Education. In this respect, we consider that Mauritius should seek an Observer Position at the OIC.

#### **4. PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION**

4-1 A democratic republic worthy of the name must guarantee citizen equality; which means the same rights for all its citizens. And that means a constant fight against all forms of discrimination – gender, ethnicity, otherwise capable – in all spheres of society: politics, business, and public institutions. It is living together that is at stake.

4-2 To create a better and harmonious Mauritius and to address various aspects of social, economic, environmental, and governance issues, the following should be high on the agenda:

- (i) To enhance educational opportunities for all, focusing on quality and equity. Introduce programs that foster understanding and respect for cultural and religious diversity.
- (ii) To encourage community-driven initiatives that promote dialogue and understanding among different ethnic and cultural groups.
- (iii) To strengthen social safety nets to reduce inequality and poverty.

#### **5. CLIMATE CHANGE**

5-1 Climate change and Environmental Sustainability is a real problem. Consequently, to preserve the eco-system, the conservation and protection of marine and terrestrial ecosystems through stricter environmental regulations and community involvement in conservation efforts, the protection of the nature is incumbent, as is recommended in all religious scriptures.

5-2 Today, development is combined with ecology to meet the challenge of climate change on planet Earth because our country is particularly vulnerable. In this new orientation, the State must invest in renewable energy sources to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and promote sustainability and implement effective waste management practices to reduce pollution and preserve natural resources.

#### **6. GOOD GOVERNANCE**

6-1 Good governance refers to the effective, efficient, and ethical management of a country, organization, or institution's resources and affairs. It is characterized by principles that ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, equity, inclusiveness, and participation of stakeholders in decision-making processes. Good governance is crucial for fostering sustainable development, ensuring social equity, and building trust between the government and its citizens.

6-2 In order to achieve these, we need to strengthen our institutions and promote transparency in government operations, to implement and enforce laws that combat corruption at all levels of society and to promote decentralization to empower local communities and improve service delivery.

#### **7. CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION**

Governments must protect all people and places of worship, implement comprehensive anti-discrimination laws, and invest in education initiatives that foster inclusion and equal rights; Protect and promote cultural heritage sites and traditions and most importantly to support local artists and cultural events that celebrate diversity and promote national identity.

## **8. HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

8-1 Our public health system has revealed its serious shortcomings with the Covid 19 pandemic. Three years later, these problems persist with the lack of doctors and nursing staff, the shortage of medicines, the quality of food for the sick and the dilapidated equipment and infrastructure. There are worrying signs that the government is privileging the private health care system to the detriment of the public.

8-2 The management of the health system needs to be rethought to gain in efficiency, especially of administrative structures. This brings us back to the central question of the efficiency/productivity of the public service, to ensure universal access to quality healthcare services and to launch campaigns to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent non-communicable diseases.

## **9. YOUTH**

The future of a country is its youth. However, the sad fact is that for a very large majority, young people in Mauritius no longer believe in the future of the country and many of them want to emigrate. The reasons given are, among others, nepotism and the absence of meritocracy. To fight against the 'brain-drain', an innovative policy is needed to restore confidence in the country and prevent the country from being emptied of a large part of its youth. And this against a backdrop of an ageing population, which is incubating a demographic bomb.

## **10. AGEING POPULATION**

The demographic problem must be understood beyond its economic and financial dimension (ratio of dependence of the non-active to the active). The ageing of the population is indeed a complex societal issue. The overbidding on the amount of the pension to seduce this segment of the electorate is, let's face it, irresponsible. The elderly population will be at the heart of our society with new and diverse needs affecting life in society, as well as the hardware and software of our health system. There is an urgent need to defuse the demographic bomb.

## **11. DRUGS, VIOLENCE AND INSECURITY**

Drugs are wreaking havoc and drug trafficking has become an important pillar of the national economy. The mafia has infiltrated the country's strategic institutions. All the political parties and alliances aspiring to govern the country agree on the intensity and magnitude of this scourge and express their willingness to wage a merciless fight against traffickers and to consolidate the initiatives underway for the victims. In the face of this scourge that has become globalized with its mafias, its roads and its hubs, good intentions are not enough. We must give the necessary means to those who fight on the ground, both with the victims and against traffickers and dealers. The various forms of violence associated with it must be well understood in order to find appropriate solutions.

## **12. ADDRESS THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS**

Commit to protecting the most vulnerable amidst economic uncertainty and alleviate financial burdens on struggling households. Therefore, it is imperative to provide financial assistance and support to families struggling with the rising cost of living, ensuring that basic needs are met; to advocate for a living wage that reflects the true cost of living, reducing financial stress on households and to foster an economic environment that promotes real job creation, particularly in areas with high Muslim populations, ensuring equal opportunities for all Mauritian citizens.

### **13. CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS**

- 13 – 1 The Constitutional reform which led to the Independence of Mauritius was based on the Constitutional review talks held at the then colonial office on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1961 and which laid emphasis on the need to consider the heterogeneity of the population and to include provision for adequate safeguards for the liberties of the individual and the interests of the various communities.
- 13 – 2 The MCC notes with concern the repeated criticism from certain quarters against the Best Loser System (BLS), which guarantees the different segments of the Mauritian population a fair representation in the National Assembly.
- 13 – 3 Far from being an institutionalised form of “communalism”, as erroneously and persistently suggested by the same quarters, the BLS guarantees the main sections of the Mauritius population a fair representation and effective participation in the affairs of the country.
- 13 – 4 The MCC therefore urges Political Parties to maintain the present BLS, until and unless a better formula is devised which can adequately and effectively guarantee the minorities a fair representation in the National Assembly.
- 13 - 5 The MCC is of the further view that the present system of first past the poll be maintained, but a system of proportional representation be introduced with a view to effectively compensating the imbalance created between the number of seats secured and the percentage of votes scored as a result of the first past the poll.

### **14. FUNDING OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

The MCC is of the view that proper legislation be introduced with a view to reducing expenses incurred by political parties to a minimum.

### **15. FAIR REPRESENTATION**

The MCC further insists that the concept of fair representation be based on meritocracy and extended not only to the Cabinet but also to all Government agencies and public owned/ controlled companies with a view to developing a real sense of belonging based on equality of opportunities and justice.

### **16. THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT**

16-1 The MCC avers that the Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) be enacted at the earliest possible. The FoIA will allow the public the right to request access to records from any government agency. It is intended to ensure transparency in the government by providing the public with the ability to obtain information about the operations and activities of government agencies.

16-2 Without openness we cannot hope to encourage greater participation in our democratic life, and without openness we cannot hope to build public confidence in the way that we are governed.

16-3 The FoIA will give the public new rights to information held by government departments, parliament, local authorities, health services, schools, colleges, universities, the police force, parastatal bodies, and publicly owned companies.



## **17. ABUSE OF POWER, FAVOURITISM AND CORRUPTION**

- 17-1 The MCC notes with concern an increasingly high degree of abuse of power and discriminatory treatment adopted by a number of Government Departments.
- 17-2 Good governance is a vital necessity and everything must be done to put an end to our international image "massacred" with the scandals hitting our financial/offshore center, and other cases affecting the country's security and drug trafficking, with Mauritius as a hub and its associated mafias. Let's do what is necessary against the risk of scaring away the investors that the country needs for its development. It is a vast project that requires a profound institutional reorganization. The image among travellers has taken a bad hit with Air Mauritius' setbacks and the way it manages them.
- 17 – 3 It is well known that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, hence the need for in-built mechanism to reduce abuse of power to a minimum is badly felt.

## **18. NOMINATIONS, APPOINTMENT AND PROMOTIONS**

### **18-1 Absence of security of tenure**

- 18-1-1 It is a matter of regret that the members of Public Service Commissions no longer enjoy the security of tenure which was agreed upon at the 1965 Constitutional talks, and the tenure of the members of the Public Service Commission now depends on the whims and caprices of the political masters of the day.
- 18-1-2 The MCC feels that the absence of security of tenure of the members of the Commissions coupled with the lack of certainty as to the criteria for appointment and promotion in the civil service, is a fertile ground for favoritism and the non-respect of meritocracy.

### **18-2 Service Commissions and the need for security of tenure**

- 18-2-1 In order to dispel the prevailing suspicion that normally accompanies appointments and promotions in the Mauritius Public Service and Local Government and to remove all outside interference, prejudice or bias in the choice of the members of the Civil Service and the Local Authorities, it is of vital importance that the members of the Service Commissions by whatever name called be guaranteed security of tenure.
- 18-2-2 Parastatal bodies including State owned companies, and companies where the State is the main shareholder should set up National appointment Committees.
- 18-2-3 Appointments and promotions are very sensitive issues. Meritocracy should be the prevailing criterion. Care should be taken to ensure that effective institutional safeguards exist against the abuse of power.
- 18-2-4 Schemes of service should be devised, after consultation with the workers representative, in such as a way as to ensure efficiency and to prevent their arbitrary manipulation to suit the convenience of particular candidates.

18-2-5 The present criteria applicable for promotion and appointment are satisfactory. However, they lack the essential quality of certainty.

18-2-6 Therefore, it becomes a matter of paramount importance for the adoption of a mathematical formula where each criterion would carry a given number of points and the candidate scoring the highest number of marks would be selected. It is believed that such a formula will serve the useful purpose of guaranteeing impartiality and transparency. This method also provides a fair and scientific way of selecting the best candidates, thereby improving the standard of efficiency in the service and any person dissatisfied with the decision should be able to appeal to an Appellate Body which shall have full powers to look in all the aspects of appointments and promotions. The results of the selection should be made public, so that both the successful and unsuccessful candidates should be in a position to assess whether or not the selection has been made judiciously.

## **19. MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION.**

19-1 At a time when we are moving towards e-government, all information and communication routes have to be left wide open and every citizen should be able to accede to information fairly quickly and easily. In this connection the MCC is making the following proposals:

19-1-1 Government Gazette to be published in a consumer-friendly version and put on online for easy access by any citizen.

19-1-2 Government departments and parastatal bodies should within their respective organisation set up effective and efficient public relations/communication units to facilitate access to services offered by each organisation.

19-1-3 The setting up of a strong electronic, photographic and audiovisual department within the national archives.

## **20. FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

20-1 The MCC is fully conscious of the relatively small size of the country and of its dependence on the outside world, particularly at this juncture of globalisation. However, the government should adopt a foreign policy in an intelligent manner in order not to sacrifice its sovereignty and follow the dictates of foreign powers. Little Mauritius should be able to say 'NO' whenever its sovereignty is in danger.

20-2 All international treaties to which Mauritius is a signatory should be easily accessible to the population.

## **21. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**

21-1 In regard to the 'The National Social Inclusion Foundation (NSIF), the MCC considers it important to review its functioning, the criteria concerning the contribution of companies and firms, the disbursement of funds to NGOs. In the same breath, the genuine NGOs should be more empowered and their leaders should be given the opportunity to follow training courses in that connection.

The MCC acknowledges the importance of funding agencies such as Trust Funds for the vulnerable group, in the laudable attempt to assist Non-Governmental Organisations in the realization of social projects aimed at community development.

- 21-2 However, the MCC notes that the existence of those funding organisations, and the manner in which they function are not well known to the population at large. There is also the perception that the funds at the disposal of those organisations are not being equitably and judicially distributed.
- 21-3 With a view to helping the funding organisations to function efficiently, and judicially, the MCC makes the following proposals:
- 21-3-1 The management of the funding organisations should be entrusted to persons of proven integrity and belonging to different segments of the Mauritian population.
- 21-3-2 To eliminate favoritism and corruption, it is essential that criteria for the project funding be clearly laid out.
- 21-3-3 For the sake of transparency in the management and disposal funds, it is suggested that that the approved projects and their respective costs as well as the identity of each beneficiary be made public.

## **22. PARTICIPATORY APPROACH**

- 22-1 Let's block the deadly autocratic dynamic that has been underway in recent years. The necessary step to build the future is the gathering of all the living forces, development and social actors. Within the framework of a living democracy based on a participatory approach. Let us ensure, to begin with, a balance between the three poles of power – the executive, the legislative and the judiciary – in order to strengthen the foundation of the rule of law with the separation of powers. For the implementing these proposals requires a collaborative effort involving government, civil society, private sector, and international partners. Continuous monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensure progress towards a better and harmonious Mauritius for all its citizens.
- 22-2 The country needs a strong and just state to ensure the security of citizens against internal and external threats. The State must modernize, among other things with the digitization of public services to gain in efficiency with gains in productivity. The mission of the strategic planning carried out by the State is to bring coherence through the articulation of initiatives. It goes without saying that all this must be based on social dialogue.
- 22-3 Any process of profound change requires a method, requires a setting in motion. In the coming weeks we will develop the axes of an electoral program, including the method.

**THE PRESIDENT**

**THE SECRETARY**

*Date : 12 October 2024*