

**Statement by Mauritius**  
**94<sup>th</sup> IOM Council Meeting, 29 November 2007, Geneva**

**Chairperson and Members of the Council  
Observers,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

My intervention relates to how migration contributes to the reform agenda of Government.

**1 From the economic miracle to the triple shocks**

Mauritius is a small island developing nation, forming part of the upper middle income group of countries. Endowed with little natural resources, it is fragile and far from its markets - both import and export ones. After a period of relatively fast growth - referred to as the economic miracle by many instances - Mauritius is confronted with major challenges that it wants to turn into an opportunity for a renewed push to growth with equity. The country is facing a sharp transition from success based on trade preferences to competition in the global environment. It is responding with a bold reform programme to triple shocks: (1) dismantling of the Multi fibre Agreement, (2) sharp cuts in the guaranteed sugar price and (3) soaring oil prices.

Given the negative impact on two key sectors, the Government is committed to creating new higher paying jobs by opening the country, facilitating investment and improving the Business Climate, now the best in Africa. As part of this restructuring effort, Government is promoting the emergence of Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) and encouraging workers to become entrepreneurs. This could be an attractive option, particularly for those retrenched workers from both the sugar and textiles sectors. Circular migration could be a part of this strategy by offering low income and low skilled workers an opportunity to rapidly build up their human capital and financial savings before returning home to start a business with active Government support. At the same time, Mauritius continues to import labour for the lower end of the market. Unemployment more or less equals the inflow of foreign workers.

## **2 The Reform Agenda**

Conscious of the need to move the country to global competitiveness, Government has embarked in 2005 on a comprehensive 10-year Economic Reform Programme to restructure the economy. The reform programme focuses on the following four planks: (a) fiscal consolidation and restoring fiscal discipline; (b) improving the Investment Climate to move to the top ten investment-friendly locations; (c) mobilising Foreign Direct Investment (FDI); and (d) restructuring the economy.

The main thrust of the extensive reform programme is based on restructuring the sugar sector and modernisation of the textiles and clothing sector; consolidating the tourism and financial services sectors; promoting emerging sectors such as ICT, the medical hub, the multi-disciplinary centre of excellence as a building block for a knowledge hub, light engineering, Integrated Resort Schemes, the seafood hub, aquaculture and oceanic land-based activities; reforming the labour market and a large scale re-training programme of workers in restructuring sectors and the unemployed and negotiation of temporary migration programmes that would enable Mauritians to build up their skills abroad and on return, find employment in new sectors or start a business under the SME incubator scheme.

## **3 Migration's role in to the Mauritian Strategy**

Government is keen to develop Circular Migration programmes with countries in Europe, the Middle East, Australia and Canada with built-in incentives to return. A first batch of Mauritians will go to Canada in 2008 and we have set up a joint working Group with France to explore a pilot Circular Migration programme that we hope to finalize by the time of a workshop on circular migration planned for mid-2008 in Mauritius with assistance from the EC.

The Circular Migration Programme would help (1) maximize the development potential of migrants returning home after a limited stay abroad, bringing with them new skills, savings and ideas; (2) encourage remittance flows which will improve long term benefits to migrants' families and enhance development impacts; and (3) Facilitate the Mauritian Diaspora's return home and assist in the development of the country. IOM would facilitate through bilateral negotiations to look for increased visa allocations for our unemployed so that after their temporary stay abroad, they return to Mauritius.

A pilot project is being finalised with the inputs from both the EU and IOM; once operational, the scheme would be extended to the other proposed countries. The three-tire approach is also being envisaged

Government on its part is creating a conducive environment for the promotion of business and SMEs and a new package of incentives is being put in place.

Government has requested IOM's assistance in the development of the following migration interventions:

- (i) mobilizing resources from the various Mauritian Diaspora by facilitating their return home, bringing with them new skills, knowledge and financial resources;
- (ii) Capacity building; and
- (iii) support for a study of labour demand/opportunities abroad.

Mauritius has a long history in terms of labour employed abroad. Since the early 1960s and 1970's, many Mauritians have migrated and it is estimated that there are some 200,000 Mauritians (about 15 % of total population). The main countries are UK, France, Australia and Canada. The remaining are scattered around the world in countries like Italy and Belgium, among others.

#### **4 The Empowerment Programme and migration strategy**

The setting up of the Empowerment Programme (EP) is yet another key component of the Economic Reform Programme. EP will unlock opportunities for the unemployed, for those recycled from their jobs, for women, for our young people entering the labour force and for small and medium entrepreneurs. The programme will also facilitate the transition from sugar, textiles and other activities hit by shocks, into higher value added activities with better paying jobs.

EP is intervening in seven critical activities, namely:-

1. workfare programme emphasizing training and re-skilling of the unemployed and retrenched workers;
2. land for social housing;
3. land for small entrepreneurs;
4. special programmes for unemployed women;
5. setting up of tourist villages;
6. assistance for outsourcing; and
7. support for development of new entrepreneurs and SMEs

## **5 Conclusion**

The wave of migration has affected all countries and no one nation can resolve the issue on its own. Though a small economy, Mauritius has the desire and vision to participate in all initiatives so that every person - young and less young, professional or unskilled, women or man - can find a place to work, according to his//her skills, in a better world of work, hence our migration project.

IOM with its team would be the privileged facilitator but can succeed only if all of us are active participants in the process. The recent opening of an office is a sign of this growing collaboration of Mauritius with the IOM.

Thank you.