

PRIZE GIVING DAY –SIR ABDOOL RAZACK MOHAMED
STATE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Respected Teachers, Administrators, Students

I am very pleased to be among you this morning. Thanks for the warm welcome. I have spent the larger part of my professional life with students for having been a secondary school teacher and a Senior Lecturer at the Mauritius Institute of Education.

And I know the special meaning that a Prize Giving Day has in the life of the School Community.

Indeed Prize Giving Day Celebrates success. It is an occasion when high academic performance of students is acknowledged and rewarded.

Let me congratulate all the prize winners. Winning a prize is a great moment for a student. It boosts his or her self-esteem and self-confidence and urges him or her to achieve still better results in future.

What about those many of you who are not prize winners to-day? Should you be discouraged? Or should the situation make you lose confidence in yourself? Not at all. On the contrary it should urge you to challenge yourself to be a prize winner on the next Prize Giving Day. You will work harder, with more discipline and steadfastness. You will manage your time more effectively. You will organise your study systematically well and high performance is bound to come and that will earn you prizes.

Seek to compete with yourself, always trying to do better next time. I urge all of you students to work to your utmost potential. Strive towards perfection. If each and every student adopts this strategy and challenge, the overall performance of the school will be high indeed.

I gather that since starting its operations in the year 1978, your school has been obtaining very good results at S.C. and H.S.C. examinations. Indeed since 2009, the percentage of passes at the School Certificate exams was very high, ranging between 90 and 100% and at the Higher School Certificate Level the pass rate was also very high, ranging from 70 to 100%. What is more, the school succeeded in having one laureate in 2013. The school has also won many prizes at National and International Level especially in the ICT sector. I gather that Sir Abdool Razack Mohamed SSS is the first school to have introduced cloud computing in the school management. It is equipped with a public Address System and a CCTV.

Let me congratulate the rector, the teachers, the parents and the students for these excellent results. I wish that this year it will be still better. BUT how can it be better when the pass rate is already 100% or nearly 100% you will ask. Well, % pass rate is only quantitative. What the school can now focus on is improvement in quality i.e. in the grades. This is how the school will increase its chances of producing more than one laureate.

I am happy to learn that students at the school are encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities. I warmly congratulate the students and the school for these initiatives even though these activities are not examinable.

To you students, I will say this: Do not miss any chance of participating in any extra-curricular activity that your school offers, be it theatre, debate, quiz, tree

planting, organizing an exhibition or an outing, a concert, blood donation, or poem recitation.

Talking of poems, I would recommend to teachers and students the following 3 poems for reading, recitation, discussion and analysis. I am thinking of:

“Rudyard Kipling’s”: “IF”

“Rabindranath Tagore’s”: Where the mind is without fear

And “Abraham Lincoln’s”: Letter to the Head Master

I can tell you that I personally love and enjoy reading these poems and I have tried as far as possible to apply the ideas in my life and I can assure you that these lofty ideas have positively influenced me in developing my personality, giving me confidence in myself and strength to face difficulties in life and to enjoy success, when it comes.

Participating in extra-curricular activities will help you acquire and develop numerous skills. Organisational skills, research skills, leadership, time management, the sense of responsibility and team spirit. You will become an attractive person. And you will succeed in life. If you’ve never taken part in an extra-curricular activity, grab the first opportunity that comes your way. If you are used to taking part, well, keep it up. In the poem “IF” of Rudyard Kipling we have this sentence: “ Fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run” – meaning spend your precious time, while you are young – in doing worthy activities. Time is unforgiving. It does not come back. It does not give you a second chance. Distance run means worthy activities.

I know what I am telling you. I can assure you that my participation in extra-curricular activities in my youth have helped me develop numerous personal skills. Above all self confidence and public speaking skills. If I could do it. You can do it. Anyone can do it. I would therefore urge the Rector and teachers to provide as much opportunity to students to organise and be engaged in extra-curricular activities.

W. Woodsworth has written: "The child is father of the man". What does this mean? It means that the child or young man or/girl you are today will produce the adult you will become in future i.e. a number of years from now. You are now in your formative years. So get involved in activities that will develop your personality, your character. Constructive activities like theatre, sports, music, poetry recitation. Of course, without neglecting your academic studies. I know that the school is doing very well in that context. Keep it up. The, as Rabindranath Tagore says in his poem you will be "where the mind is without fear and the head is held high".

To you teachers I would recommend reading, understanding and applying the ideas contained in the letter of Abraham Lincoln to the Head Master of the school his son was going to.

Here are some extracts:- - Teach him to be gently with people.

- In school, teach him that it is far more honourable to fail than to cheat.
- Teach him if you can that a dollar earned is of far more value than a dollar found.
- Teach him to learn to lose, and also enjoy winning.
- Teach him, if you can, the wonder of books but also give him quite time to ponder on the eternal mystery of birds in the sky, bees in the sun and flowers on a green hillside.

And at the end of the poem:

- Teach him always to have sublime faith in himself (self confidence), because, then, he will have sublime faith in mankind.

Beautiful, great values that schools would do well to inculcate in our school children

Now I would like to come to something which is of great concern to the Minister of Education and to the Prime Minister. I am referring to that ugly and destructive thing which is having a terrible negative impact on our society – scourge of drugs. And drug consumption in schools. I have learnt that it is not a problem here at the Sir Abdool Razack Mohamed SSS. I would never have believed that drugs would be present in schools in Mauritius. I read in the newspapers: “A Maurice, il est temps de sortir des sentiers battus, de faire preuve d’une réelle volonté politique et institutionnelle mettant l’accent sur la conscience professionnelle pour un assainissement de notre société à la dérive” comme le reconnaît le Premier Ministre lui même et sauver une jeunesse enfouie dans la désespérance”.

I don’t need to translate. “Une société à la dérive”.! Surely the author of the article is referring to the high rate of road accidents, the increasing frequency of abominable crimes and of course the problem of drug consumption. We read on newspapers of drug traffickers with drugs worth Rs 100 million being caught at the SSR Airport. My fellow countrymen, the situation is alarming. As responsible citizens we have to be concerned and ask ourselves “what we can do about it?” I’ll tell you what we can do about it together, myself, the rector, the teachers, parents and you, all of you students present here.

The rector has the responsibility to ensure by whatever means he has at his disposal to ensure that his school is totally, I mean totally drug free. He will organise talks and film shows to explain and depict the destructive effects of

drugs, especially the synthetic ones. Don't die of ignorance. He will also keep constant watch on the activities of students. Teachers have the responsibility to ensure that his or her class is totally drug free; that his or her students have the strength to say "NO" to destructive peer pressure; that his or her students have the freedom to confide in him or her. Teachers do care for the well being of his/her students and would strive hard to ensure that his/her students do not fall into the one way passage to hell.

Research has shown that drug addiction can utterly destroy the life of the person and make of him a parasite in society, having to depend on others for his livelihood – many having to turn to robbery, commit crime and end their days in prison.

Each one of us has the freedom to make a choice about the kind of life we want; about the kind of person we want to become in society. I would urge you students to choose the golden path, the right path and strive to become:-

- A well educated, a cultured person
- Develop multiple life skills
- Develop character and become an attractive person. These are the requisites for a rich, enjoyable and fulfilling life.

Never forget that the way you conduct your life during childhood and during your formative youthful years will determine the type of adult man or woman you will become. The choice is yours.

Let me conclude by repeating my congratulations to the award winners while urging the non-award winners to strive to their utmost potential and win prizes in their turn. Congratulations to the rector, teachers, parents and students for the

excellent SC & HSC results and wishing the school improved results in terms of quality. Thank you for having me as your Chief Guest. It was a great honour for me.

Thank you for your attention.

Paramasivum Pillay Vyapoory, G.O.S.K.
Vice-President of the Republic
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