

**Launching of book “The Indentured and Their Route” on 5 June 2024 at
10 a.m at Subramaniam Bharati hall, MGI**

Mr Rajcoomar Rampertab, Director General MGI

Srimati Bhaswati Mukherjee

Mr. Mookhesswur Choonee, President GOPIO International

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning

It is an immense pleasure for me to associate myself with the launching of the book **“The Indentured and their Route – A relentless quest for Identity”**, authored by Mrs. Bhaswati Mukherjee”.

I thank Mr. Choonee, President of and Gopio International and his members for organising this launch.

GOPIO International is recognized as a global organisation that brings together People of Indian Origin from around the world. Their numerous activities aim at uniting the diaspora to address common challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen

Mrs. Mukherjee, the author of the book we are launching today, has an impressive CV. She has distinguished herself in multiple roles as a diplomat. Widely regarded as a foremost expert on European affairs, she is also respected for her long

association with the UN and its agencies culminating in her role as India's Permanent Representative to UNESCO.

“The Indentured and their Route: A Relentless Quest for Identity”, is her fourth book in which she relates the poignant story of indentured labour from India, forced to go to the West Indies, Mauritius, Suriname, Reunion and Fiji islands as a consequence of poverty,

Mauritius is grateful to Mrs. Mukherjee for her support, as Ambassador of India to UNESCO, in the inscription of Aapravasi Ghat as UNESCO's World Heritage In July 2006.

During the Executive Board of UNESCO at its 195th session held in Paris on 20 October 2014, UNESCO supported the initiative of Mauritius to set up the Indentured Labour Route Project and the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund hosted the secretariat for the project. I must commend Mr. Choonee for the important role he played in presenting this initiative.

What could be more appropriate than for Mauritius to develop this project. Mauritius, whose history is unique as the only country in the world having a world heritage site for indentured labour and another site [Le Morne Cultural Landscape] which symbolises resistance to slavery.

I do not have much to say on the Indentured Labour Route project since the previous speakers have elaborated on it and detailed information appears in the book of Mrs. Mukherjee.

I can only mention that The International Indentured Labour Route brings together all countries having experienced the migration of contractual labour. It creates a network of persons, institutions who will collaborate, share and disseminate knowledge about the indentured system, the history and culture of its descendants and contribute to the nation building process in their countries as appropriate.

Generations later, descendants of the girmitiyas are fully assimilated into the culture and politics of the foreign lands. Though their influence and position in society varied from place to place, yet they retained their affinity towards India, as did India with them.

In the case of Mauritius, when these labourers reached the shores of the Island, they faced hardship and extreme poverty. Yet, they endured and kept going. They not only preserved their culture, traditions and language but they also gave them new wings to flourish. And, today, the beauty of Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati, Marathi, Urdu and Telugu continues to enrich the fabric of the Mauritian society.

Mauritius would have never been what it is today if our history had not been shaped by the contribution of the Indentured labourers and their descendants.

Ladies and gentlemen

I shall conclude with a quote of Indo-Trinidadian Poet and Nobel laureate of Literature V.S. Naipaul: I quote –*“The indentured labourers are our ancestors, we carry their names, their blood flows through our veins, they form an integral part of our origins and identities, our history is a continuation of their history...as we are their inheritors...”* unquote.

Let us learn more from the indentured and their route by welcoming the book of Mrs. Bhaswati Mukherjee which I have an immense pleasure to launch.