

Commemoration of World Human Rights Day organised by the United Nations Association (Mauritius) on Saturday 10 December 2022 at 10:00 hrs at the Municipal Council of Vacoas-Phoenix

Today, December 10, we celebrate International Human Rights Day. As we live in an often troubled, brutal and violent world, it is necessary to continue to celebrate and, above all, to defend human rights whenever and wherever they are threatened or violated.

Beyond this anniversary, this day is an important moment to remember that the fight for human rights must continue.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights contains thirty articles detailing as many fundamental rights but, it is up to all of us, individually and collectively, to ensure that these rights are respected.

How not to recall the foundation of any democracy and the foundation of human rights: “**Men are born free and equal in dignity and rights**”. However, it is clear that, in our contemporary world, this primary necessity is far from being a reality. Millions of babies are born every day, but who can say today that all these children are born equal?

Alas, not all children born will have the same chances. For some, the life that begins will be easy and sweet; for others, they will have to survive in a hostile environment lacking food and water.

For still others, they will have to grow up and build themselves in countries at war, fearing every day for their survival and that of their families. Equality in rights and in dignity as well as equality of opportunity between all human beings is still an ideal towards which we must strive and an objective which we must never lose sight of.

However, a Human Rights Act will not, alone, magically create a rights-aware, and a rights-respecting, culture. We need institutions such as the Human Rights Commission and NGOs to play an active role in the promotion and protection of human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen

Human rights will not - by themselves - put a roof over the heads of homeless persons. But human rights Act provides us with a language and a framework that can help shift the debate from one of welfare and pity, to one of rights and empowerment. That's an extremely important step. We all know the difference it makes to be viewed as an equal with an entitlement, rather than as a recipient seeking benevolence.

Human rights entail both rights and obligations. States assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights. The obligation to respect means that States must refrain from interfering with or curtailing the enjoyment of human rights.

The obligation to protect requires States to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses. The obligation to fulfil means that States must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights.

At the individual level, while we are entitled our human rights, we should also respect the human rights of others.

While government bodies and corporations are often expected to monitor and regulate themselves, self-regulation does not always successfully uphold rights.

Front line watchdogs take on this important citizen role of holding communities, government and corporations accountable. Watchdog monitoring provides an opportunity to analyze, understand, influence and to engage community members in human rights work.

In this respect, I must congratulate the founders and the present members of the United Nations Association of Mauritius who for 47 years has been promoting the principles and ideals of the United Nations; and connecting civil societies & citizens to forge sustainable solutions for Peace, Human Rights and Social Justice.

Ladies and gentlemen

Mauritius has been sparing no effort to foster its development based on universal values of democracy, good governance, the rule of law, and the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, drawing on its cultural and ethnic diversity.

The objective of the Government is to provide a human rights-based approach to the economic, social and cultural development of the country in order to enable citizens to enjoy a good quality of life, based on human dignity, equality of treatment, economic empowerment and social justice.

As a multiracial and multi-ethnic nation, Mauritius had drawn on its diversity to build a cohesive and tolerant society based on shared values, such as respect, equality, unity, inclusion and solidarity.

Numerous legislative acts confer protection of human rights, and such protection is, arguably, guaranteed by virtue of Mauritius's ratification of international human rights instruments at the level of both the United Nations and African Union.

These include the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**, the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**, and the **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights**. Mauritius is also a state party to all the major global and regional conventions on women's rights, the rights of minorities and children's rights.

Mauritius had not only acceded to the core human rights conventions, but it had also seen to it that those instruments had been to a large extent incorporated into domestic law.

Our Republic is still hailed as a country where basic human rights, fundamental freedoms and liberties prevail. This relative success can be attributed to the culture of democracy and respect for the rule of law that exists in the country and the strong will of various stakeholders to uphold this culture.

Ladies and gentlemen

There can be no peace without development, no development without peace, and no lasting peace or sustainable development without respect for human rights and the rule of law.

When we achieve human rights and human dignity for all people – they will build a peaceful, sustainable and just world.

Let us therefore all share the dream of Martin Luther King, that is, a world where all people, of all races and colors and backgrounds, are enjoying freedom and democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen, I seize this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Xmas and a happy New Year 2023, in peace, justice and harmony.

THANK YOU