

**Opening Ceremony of One-Day Reflection Workshop organized by CEDEM
on Friday 17 November 2023 at 09:30 hrs at Gold Crest Hotel**

Mr Milko van Gool, Head of Development Cooperation at the European Union
Delegation to Mauritius and Seychelles

Kumarduth Puddo, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Gender Equality and
Family Welfare

Ms Jeanine Yeung, Project Manager, European Union Delegation to Mauritius and
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Mrs Sharona Mauree, Investigator, Ombudsperson for Children's Office

Mrs. Sehenaz Hossain Saeb, Managing Director, CEDEM

Dr. Trisha Boodhoo, Project Manager, CEDEM

Ladies and Gentlemen

All protocol observed

Good morning

I am pleased to be in your midst for the opening of the workshop on a theme which
is of much concern to the authorities, NGOs and civil society at large.

Stakeholders and young care leavers themselves will spend the day to discuss on
the realities, challenges, and possible solutions in the process of children leaving
residential care at the age of 18, their social reintegration and their after-care
followup.

Young people leaving institutionalised care are recognized to be one of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in society. In comparison to those young people living in a family, care leavers experience high unease on the eve of care leaving.

A combination of insufficient upbringing before institutional care and during institutional care serves to disadvantage this group of young people in many ways.

Ladies and gentlemen

Leaving institutions marks a new phase in life of those young people, in which they are officially viewed as mature adults. It is a time when young people make important decisions about their lives including their future education, career and living arrangements.

Most young people have strong family and social networks to support them in these decisions. However, young people leaving residential care are often expected to make this transition abruptly and at a young age with no family or social networks to support them.

The leaving and aftercare supports provided by the State may not be sufficient to provide for the needs of these young people, leaving them at risk of homelessness, substance abuse, low levels of educational attainment and unemployment.

Given the vulnerability of young people leaving care, we have a responsibility morally and legally to provide for them and equip them for their journey to adulthood.

The State, NGOs and the civil society should, throughout the period of a child's care, aim at preparing the child to assume self-reliance and to integrate fully in the community through the acquisition of social and life skills.

Ladies and gentlemen

Special efforts should be made to ensure that a young person leaving care has a person who can help facilitate his/her independent living.

Aftercare arrangements should be prepared as early as possible. Ongoing educational and vocational training opportunities should be part of the young persons' life skill education so as to help them to become financially independent.

For many, the best thing about leaving care is gaining independence - being able to make their own decisions, get a job and their own home. Unfortunately, leaving a residential care does not always live up to young peoples' hopes and plans.

For some it brought uncertainty about the future. The worst thing is often the responsibility of managing on their own and struggling on a low income.

Care leavers want people who cared about them and help them successfully move on from care in their lives. But not everyone found the support they needed. Many young people feel very lonely and socially isolated since leaving care. This may affect their emotional well-being and triggered mental ill-health.

Placing aftercare on a statutory basis would strengthen the political commitment to these children and ensure better outcomes for them, their families and wider society.

Care-leavers – those transitioning from alternative care towards young adulthood – are widely recognized as a vulnerable population, yet child protection legislation seldom applies to them because they have reached adulthood.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recommended that the State strengthen its efforts to ensure and provide for follow-up and aftercare to young people leaving care. A section of the Child Care Act, 1991 outlines how young people leaving care ‘may’ be supported when they reach their eighteenth birthday.

We must recognise that there are still numerous gaps in aftercare provision for care leavers leaving the residential care system. The needs of care leavers are many and varied and call for a diverse and responsive service system to better support them and alter their future transitions.

There is no ‘one size fits all’ response that will meet all need, but rather a range of responses that target individual needs and promote a greater overall opportunity for intervention.

Young people only have one chance to make a successful transition from adolescents to adulthood. All of them, especially those who are leaving the residential care system, deserve to be appropriately supported to make this transition, facilitating them to become independent, self-sufficient, confident young adults.

It is important for residential care givers to maintain contact with their former residents through tracer studies. These studies will focus on understanding the care leavers' experiences: **prior** to entry into residential care, **in** residential care and **after** leaving residential care (including preparation and after-care support, help and advice received before leaving care, and after-care support).

Regular group meetings can also be considered to allow them to share ideas and learn from each other's experiences.

Ladies and gentlemen

Before concluding, I want to acknowledge the assistance of the European Union for co-funding this workshop. As a matter of fact, over the years, EU and Mauritius have become reliable and longstanding partners.

I commend CEDEM for the organisation of this activity. This NGO is known for actively campaigning to promote children's survival, protection, development and rights. Its main objective is to improve the quality of children's lives.

Finally, to you participants of this One-Day Reflection Workshop, I thank you for your participation and wish you fruitful discussions and deliberations.

THANK YOU