

International Migrants Day 2023 organised by the Muslim Cultural Heritage Society on Monday 18 December 2023 at 10:30 hrs at the Dr. Idrice Goomany Centre

A very good morning to you all.

I am really pleased to join you this morning to celebrate International Migrants Day. I thank the Muslim Cultural Heritage Society for this initiative.

Our Republic has always been an island of migration all along its history. We are all descendants of migrant people from different countries, following different patterns of settlement which resulted in a system where migration, labour market and ethnicity are strongly and deeply intertwined.

Migration is a fact of life with humans moving around long before borders were built to regulate this movement. As the world changes around communities and individuals, there are ever changing needs to relocate and this phenomenon is set to continue.

According to UN statistics, as of July 1, 2020, the number of international migrants worldwide was estimated to be nearly 281 million, representing approximately 3.5% of the world's population.

This day is about migrants in all their forms. People migrate for many reasons. The motives of migration vary widely. Migration may occur in reaction to poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, persecution, or dislocation.

Ladies and gentlemen

Migrant rights are human rights. They must be respected without discrimination – and irrespective of whether their movement is forced, voluntary, or formally authorized. We must do everything possible to prevent the loss of life – as a humanitarian imperative and a moral and legal obligation.

Migrants who move out of choice have proven to be a source of prosperity, innovation, and sustainable development to countries of origin, transit, and host countries. Their financial contribution through remittance offers a lifeline to families and spur local markets especially those of Low- and Middle-Income Countries while their role in the labour market remains invaluable. Their knowledge, networks, and skills have greatly contributed to the development of resilient communities.

Yet, others migrate because they do not have a choice. In recent years, conflict, insecurity, the effects of climate change, war and conflict have heavily contributed to the forced movement whether within countries or across borders.

Ladies and gentlemen

As I mentioned earlier, Mauritius is an island of diasporas, the major components coming from Indian and African continents. An important component of our population is the Muslim community.

It is reported that the most important influx of Muslims occurred during the British regime starting from 1810.

Since their arrival in Mauritius, the Muslims contributed to a large extent to the socio-economic development of the country.

They made big sacrifices and had to struggle to preserve their religion and cultural identity. They established mosques to preserve their faith and identity. The first mosque, Al Aqsa, was built in 1805 and has been conferred the status of National Heritage as a religious and cultural site in April 2016.

The Muslim community has taken laudable initiatives to open itself to others by sharing some facets of its culture, such as distribution of dates to the public, demonstration and invitation to taste Ramadan naan, application of Mehendi on hands of non-Muslim women and offering food packs to the needy. These are commendable gestures that promote goodwill and help to build bridges among different components of the Mauritian society.

I must commend the initiatives of the Muslim Cultural Heritage Society, our host of today, to bring people together and create a sense of community. It acts as a means of accumulation, storage and transmission of human experience, thus helping in better understanding the history of the Muslim Community and will help to connect us with each other.

Ladies and gentlemen

On this International Migrants Day, let us reflect on the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. These values will help make many countries a refuge for people seeking protection and better opportunities in life. We must ensure that these values remain at the heart of our initiatives for migrants and refugees.

I shall conclude by wishing you and your families a Happy New Year 2024. May this year turn all your dreams into realities.