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***Special Theme – ‘Opportunities for the Effective Implementation of the
New Urban Agenda***

Address by

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on

Sub-theme 1- ‘Towards Inclusive, Sustainable and Adequate Housing for a
Better Future’ - The Mauritian Experience’

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Hon. President and members of the Governing Council Bureau,

Hon. Ministers, Mayors and Parliamentarians, and delegates of the Member States of the United Nations, representatives of NGO's,

Officers of UN-Habitat, Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius, I would like on the outset to thank the Governing Council of UN Habitat for inviting my delegation and be in your midst today for this **26th session of the Governing Council (GC26) of UN-Habitat**

My intervention will provide the opportunity to share the Mauritian experience on the measures we are taking to address the issue of social housing and poverty alleviation in relation to sub theme 1 of this 26th session which is '**Towards Inclusive, Sustainable and Adequate Housing for a Better Future**'.

In Mauritius, in addition to adopting the dictum that says 'un toit pour toi' a French term meaning a roof on the head of each and every citizen of the country we, are also ensuring the full social integration of the more vulnerable families into the established communities.

A glimpse of the statistical data reveals that in the inter-censal period of years 2000 to 2011, the housing stock in the Republic of Mauritius increased by 19.9% for an increase of 14.5% in the number of private households for the same period.

In this inter-censal period the housing and living conditions improved with higher proportions of households owning their houses which increased from 86.5% to 88.9%;

- Households having access to electricity from 99.0% to 99.4%; and
- with piped water inside their house from 83.7% to 94.2.

You may wish to note that these figures are comparable to situations in the developed countries.

- Government intervention in social housing provision dates from the early 1960s when a massive house building programme was launched following the passage of a severe cyclone that destroyed thousands of houses. As to date some 32,300 units have been constructed by the Government.
- Additionally some 13,500 serviced lots including building sites have been allocated on State Lands to needy families again at very nominal rents.
- The Government went further by introducing the policy of “**right to buy**” at very nominal sums for both the plots of land and the housing units that were constructed by the first Central Housing Authority that was established. So far some 19,400 families have become owners of the housing units that were constructed by this authority and some 10,600 families are now also owners of the plots of land they are occupying thereon.
- The Government of Mauritius intends to keep the tempo by providing a sum of 1billion Mauritian Rupees (which is equivalent to 29,000 USD) in the current budget for the construction of some 1,900 housing units with an additional 155 million rupees for the rehabilitation of the housing estates constructed by the current National Housing Development Company Limited, which is the executive arm of the Ministry of Housing and Lands .

Other housing incentives include:

- For instance, first time seekers of residential property in the open market are exempt from the payment of Registration Duty; even promoters are exempted from land transfer tax on plots with residential units of up to 6 million rupees for sale.
- The Government also needs to adequately secure suitable land for its social housing program. In a specific agreement with the Sugar Producers Association some 700 arpents of land has been acquired at a nominal price in the recent years and additional freehold land is

being acquired to meet the target of completing some 10,000 units in the current housing programme.

- In all Social Housing Projects implemented by Government, on-site and off-site infrastructure costs are not included in the compilation of the cost of a housing unit with the view to increase affordability to the lower income families.
- The size of the social housing units provided by Government have increased from 39m² to 50m² to provide for two bedrooms for the families to have a more decent living.
- As the country is prone to the hazards of cyclonic conditions, some 52,000 eligible families have benefited from one off cash grants of up to Rs 75, 000 for the casting of concrete roof slabs
- The Government also intends to completely eliminate squatting on State land with in-situ regularisation of some 2700 families with the possibility for transfer full ownership of the plot of land they are occupying.
- So far, the Government's contribution in social housing provision or grants has directly benefited some 97,000 families and this represents some 26% of the present housing stock.
- The income ceiling for families eligible for a housing unit provided by Government has been increased by two-fold from 10,000 rupees to 20,000 rupees while those families earning less than Rs 9520 rupees are empowered in a more holistic manner including purchase of the housing unit at only 1/3 the value of the construction cost.

Secondly, we also have other enabling agencies that are contributing in social housing provision:

- For instance, grants Government sponsored loans at a subsidised interest rate.

- On the private sector side, the Sugar Industry has also significantly contributed to the uplift of the labourers and factory workers under the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act introduced by the Government:
 - Some 128 sugar camps have been phased out and 4800 families living in deplorable housing conditions have been relocated with full land ownership.
 - In the context of restructuring the industry, some eight thousand and fifty (8050) workers going on voluntary retirement benefited a free fully serviced plot of land of 7 square perches in the first scheme introduced in 2001. The second scheme introduced in 2007 is being finalised to benefit an additional seven thousand and seven hundred (7700) employees on retirement.
- As regard private funding, banks and other financial institutions provide interesting packages with low interest rate on mortgages
- A National CSR Foundation has been set up and is jointly managed by the public and private sectors. Businesses are required to contribute at least 50% of their CSR money to this fund and the money is allocated to support civil society actions in six designated poverty alleviation areas.

A housing for every family is not an end in itself and in **an endeavour to improve the quality of life, the Government is continuing through sheer commitment, its objectives to achieve greater social inclusion and integration of one and all:**

- A Social Register of vulnerable families is kept, the Government has created the **National Empowerment Foundation (NEF)** and set up of a Marshal Plan with the view to eradicate absolute poverty. In this current year a budget of 500 million Rupees has been provided for the benefit of every adult enlisted in this Register and with the provision of this allowance no family will now live in absolute poverty in Mauritius.

Apart from the beauty of the Mauritian island and its dependent Island of Rodrigues the only natural resource we have is our human resource and the

Government leaves no stone unturned to maintain and enhance our welfare state.

The government provides Free education and free health services in public hospitals and social benefits are allocated to the old age and needy families.

- In addition to the full payment of fees for the Cambridge School Certificate and Higher School Certificate Examinations the Government has gone further by also introducing cash awards to children of the poorer families for successful completion of certain grades with a sum of up to Rs 35,000 (to 1000USD) for pass rate at the Higher School Certificate examinations
- Transport also is free for students attending their institutions, for the citizens above 60 years of age and people getting disability pensions.

To complete the trilogy for sustainable development, in addition to securing housing provision and socio-economic empowerment for all the citizens, the Government is also giving due consideration to the living environment of the settlements in Mauritius, be it in urban or rural areas.

- Heavy investment through appropriate funding is committed for the upgrading of land transport infrastructure including the implementation of a Mass Transit System –the metro Express along the Urban Corridor.
- In addition of its location in a zone of the Indian Ocean with frequent formation of cyclones, Mauritius is also vulnerable to the effects of global climate change with threats of flash floods and landslides. Through the recent enactment of the Land Drainage Bill, a Land Drainage Authority has been created to work in close collaboration with the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre to identify priority areas for drainage works throughout the island.

We are taking the necessary steps to maintain the tempo of the national economic growth. which is basically manufacturing and services including the Freeport and the hospitality sector, to secure its resilience in the context of the global uncertainties. However, we have to ensure that development is

carried out harmoniously and in a sustainable manner. To this end we are currently in the process of reviewing our Planning legislation, our National Physical Development Strategy and the Planning Policy Guidances presently in force.

Hon. President, I would also like to mention that Mauritius has successfully completed the Phase I and Phase II of the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme being implemented under the UN initiative and we are a committed partner of UN Habitat in relevant avenues of cooperation.

Hon. President, the timing of this Conference, therefore provides an excellent opportunity for the participants to exchange and learn from hands on experience of the member states for an effective implementation of the new urban agenda.

Essentially, we believe that if we truly wish to contribute to the successful implementation of Social Housing and the development of a sustainable concept for the improvement of the living conditions in our cities and towns, UN Habitat must also show strong commitments to improve the lives and living conditions of the rural population as they are the ones who secure our food production and value to a greater extent our natural resources.

To end I would like to mention the concept of PURA advocated by Late Prof, Abdul Kalaam, the Hon. President of the Republic of India. PURA is the acronym for Providing Urban Facilities to Rural Population as this will help to contain the urban drift and make our cities more manageable

With these words, Ladies and Gentlemen

I thank you for your attention.