

Speech of Honourable Deepak Balgobin, Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation

Workshop on
*"Combatting Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing
activities in the Mauritius Exclusive Economic Zone for
Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture"*
organised by the
MRIC & the Surrey Space Center, University of Surrey

Monday 16th January 2023
Caudan Arts Centre
09.30hrs

- **Honourable Sudheer Maudhoo, Minister of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping,**
- **Dr Sukon, Chairperson, MRIC,**
- **Prof. Bahorun, Executive Director, MRIC,**
- **Dr. Raffaélla Guida, Principal Investigator, Surrey Space Centre, University of Surrey UK;**
- **Heads of Institutions;**
- **Students and Researchers,**
- **Guests present here and those attending online,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Good Morning to you all.

It is an honour for me to be here today to officially launch this workshop entitled “*A Space-Based Maritime Surveillance System for Fisheries Monitoring and Anomaly detection*”.

At the very outset, I am pleased to note that this project propels Mauritius at the forefront of Research and Development (R&D) in the Space field.

We are benefitting from the support of the Surrey Space Centre at the University of Surrey in the UK, one of the most renowned institutions worldwide for its R&D in the space field.

I also acknowledge the support of the UNDP Ocean Innovation Challenge which gives this project a perspective for worldwide applicability.

We are indeed very proud, Ladies and Gentlemen, of our small island! Especially considering that it is only about two years now that Mauritius integrated the small circle of emerging Spacefaring nations.

Indeed, you will recall that in June 2021 Mauritius launched the first ever Mauritian Nanosatellite (the MIR-SAT1) in space with the support of the UNOOSA (United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs) and JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency) through the KiboCube program.

Our Satellite orbited the earth for some 10 months and took some meaningful pictures of the Mauritius region. I invite you all to visit the MRIC website to follow our achievements to date.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Republic of Mauritius offers very interesting avenues to contribute to the knowledge in space R&D. We are in a geostrategic position on the Globe ideally placed in this 'blind spot' in the Indian Ocean for space observation.

As a SIDS (Small Island Developing State) we are surrounded by some 2.3 million square kilometres of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which locks a huge potential for the socio-economic progress of this country.

Hence, if we adopt the correct strategies, we are hopeful that soon we would be able to manage and exploit sustainably our oceanic resources and engage into high end R&D to foster innovation in the Country.

With this backdrop, and as a follow-up of the first nano satellite initiative, the MRIC is supporting the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to track one of their satellites launched in November 2022, thus optimising the use of the Ground Station set up by the MRIC for the first Mauritian Satellite Initiative.

The current project with Surrey Space Centre is yet another new avenue which the MRIC is exploring in its quest to develop the Space field as a future socio-economic pillar for the Republic of Mauritius.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My Ministry realises that for our Country to be able to face the world's fluctuating economy, we need to find new and innovative initiatives and build a stronger capacity.

Space/Satellite Technology is one of the best platforms to boost innovation in a Country. We also realise that building Capacity in such new and emerging sectors is of primordial importance. This can only be achieved by exposing the younger generation to the latest technologies such as Robotics, AI, and Satellite/Space technology.

This collaboration project between the MRIC and the Surrey Space Centre is an excellent entry point for us to start engaging into high end R&D in space affairs.

African countries are actively engaging into the New Space technologies!

Many of our African neighbours, including South Africa, Egypt and Kenya, have already sent their first satellites and are collecting data from space.

And Mauritius has also adopted this trend.

The Mandate of the MRIC was extended to conduct research on identified National-Priority thrust areas to strengthen our research ecosystem.

This Government firmly believes that Space Technology represents a potent socio-economic pillar for the Republic of Mauritius in the coming decades. And my Ministry strongly encourages such bold initiatives which, in my opinion brings lots of hope in the decades to come towards the development of a new socio-economic pillar driven by Space.

Space technologies offer a formidable platform to enhancing capacity building, disaster risk management, weather and climate monitoring, connectivity to remote areas, maritime surveillance, maritime security which are key to the socio-economic development of Mauritius.

With this collaboration project between MRIC and Surrey Space Centre, we aspire to get a glimpse of how space sourced data, space/satellite technology development coupled with AI and Machine learning, could be transformed into a strong tool to consolidate our maritime surveillance system already in place.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we all know, Mauritius is an upper middle-income country and is poised to transition to the level of a high-income country, where innovation becomes the key driver of socio-economic development.

Innovation requires effective implementation, and this cannot be achieved in a sustainable manner at country level unless a structured framework is put in place that allows the 'doers of innovation' to operate and grow.

The first Mauritian Satellite opportunity opened the first chapter of Mauritius' quest to look at outer space as a new tool to help R&D and Innovation for our country.

Our collaboration with Surrey Space Centre opens the second chapter for Mauritius to engage concretely into R&D in space and exploiting satellite Data for advising Policy.

I will end by congratulating the MRIC and their collaborators from the Surrey Space Centre for initiating this very interesting project.

I wish to thank also the UNDP Ocean Innovation Challenge for supporting this whole initiative.

I wish you all the best and now declare this workshop as officially open.