

**Speech of the Hon. Deepak Balgobin, Minister of Information
Technology, Communication and Innovation for the official
opening
of the Innovation for All Summit 2020**

26 November 2020

Maritim Crystal Beach, Belle Mare

**Ms Sandrine Valère, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of
Information Technology, Communication & Innovation,**

Mr Abhishake Jugoo, Chairman of State Informatics Ltd,

Mr Jason Xia (Chia), CEO of Huawei,

**Mr Kona Yeru-ku-non-du, First Deputy Governor of the Bank of
Mauritius,**

Chairperson, Executive Directors and staff of parastatal bodies,

Head of departments and officials of various ministries,

Captains of the industry,

**Computer Scientists, IT professionals and technology
enthusiasts in the audience,**

Academics, researchers, teachers and students,

Members of the Press,

Ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning.

At the outset, allow me, on behalf of the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication & Innovation, to extend a courteous welcome to everyone in attendance for the next two days for this Innovation for All Summit 2020 organised by my Ministry in collaboration with State Informatics Ltd and Huawei.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For many years, Mauritius has been a country focused on economic growth, sustained development and inclusiveness for all. The Vision of the Government is to transform Mauritius into a High Income, inclusive and green country well before 2030.

We are happy that, today, our economy is well diversified, based on openness not only for export and import of goods and services but equally for attracting foreign skills and Foreign Direct Investments (FDI).

The technology ecosystem, represented by the 850 IT companies employing about 25,000 people, has been instrumental in making this sector the 3rd pillar of our economy, just after tourism and the financial sector.

But you will all agree that COVID-19 has drastically impacted the whole world and change our lives and Mauritius has not been spared.

At the same time, the lockdown has shown us that, with the appropriate IT infrastructure, processes and policies in place, a country can continue to function and people can continue to work from home.

In fact, the lockdown has shown that technology and innovation are now essential components in what we, today, call the new normal.

The Global Innovation Index is published every year by the World Intellectual Property Organisation and Cornell University and gives a strong indication on how innovative a country is. This ranking of Mauritius has significantly improved in the GII report, from the 82nd position in 2019 to 52nd position this year. For some time now, Mauritius has been ranked 1st in the Sub-Saharan African countries.

In addition to innovation, our government has identified a number of other growth enablers for Mauritius namely good governance, fixed & human capital investment and economic integration. Various Ministries and departments are working hard to strengthen these enablers in our country.

Dear participants,

We want to maximise the use of technology, including emerging technologies, in our journey towards a more innovative Mauritius.

Today, we live in a world where Computer Science, Software Engineering, Information Technology and Information Systems have become important differentiating elements which indicate whether a country is on the right track of development or not.

As famously said by Marc Andreessen, co-founder of Netscape, “software is eating the world” and we need a critical mass of computer scientists, software engineers and IT professionals to make our country progress further.

In addition, we also need people capable of leveraging emerging technologies such as the Internet of Things, Big Data, Blockchain and Fintech as well as Artificial Intelligence to solve the complex problems which we face today.

In addition, I believe that the 850 IT companies we have in our country today can export their technology products and services throughout the region and worldwide. We should not forget that Mauritius is part of the SADC and the COMESA and this gives us access to a massive market.

In fact, just after I became a Minister, I came to the realisation that we needed to have more road shows throughout the African continent and elsewhere, together with our friends of the private sector, but, unfortunately, COVID-19 has proved to be a complication.

But we should not despair. Today, it is possible to organise virtual road shows and, tomorrow, if the vaccines prove to be efficient, we will, in concert, go and conquer these markets.

The Government needs the private sector and I know that this feeling is reciprocated.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During these two days, I hope and I am sure that the learning curve will be tremendously upward. We need to be able to challenge ourselves in order to transform our organisations and, ultimately, our country.

The Innovation for All Summit 2020 will start shortly with two keynotes. The first one, “Digital Innovation: A Future Look” will be made by Huawei and will cover what is going to happen in the realm of technology during the next few years.

Industry 4.0 is here and it is important for people in our organisations to be fully aware of its numerous aspects and implications.

The second keynote, “The Smart Mauritius Initiative”, which is going to be jointly made by SIL and my Ministry, will explain our technological vision for our country in the years to come. The objective is for all of us to have this vision in mind so that we can work together in achieving it.

This will be followed by three important topics where speakers and panelists will discuss about:

- Our telecom infrastructure and how to best use it.
- The technological building blocks which we have now and which we can readily use to create new products and services.
- How FinTech is instrumental in making things happen.

At the end of the day, you will all have a better understanding of what we have done in the past and what we have today which we can readily use to increase the effectiveness of our organisations and to create new products and services.

Tomorrow, we will have round tables which will explore how telecom, technology and FinTech will continue to evolve in the world and in Mauritius. This will give us a strong indication of what we can aspire to in the short to medium term.

At this point, allow me to share to you that Cabinet has just approved for the creation of a Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council whose role will be to coordinate all activities related to Emerging Technologies in Mauritius.

This include skills development and capacity building, ethical, data privacy and cybersecurity concerns and, fundamentally, formulating a comprehensive Emerging Technologies strategy at the national level.

This Mauritius Emerging Technologies Council supersedes the AI Council that would have focussed only on AI.

It will be composed of policy makers and technology experts who will work together in order to propel our country further.

Dear participants,

On completion of the Summit, we will have a report prepared by rapporteurs from the National Computer Board and the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council, two parastatal bodies falling under the aegis of my Ministry.

This report will contain a number of actionable items which will guide us, at the level of the Ministry but also, I hope, in the private sector, for the next few years. I will make sure that this report is circulated to all of you.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have been witnessing the transformation of Mauritius into a smart nation for some time now. And this has greatly accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, no doubt thanks to the massive investment we have made during the past years in our telecom infrastructure.

Now, it is time to move up one level. And this is what this summit is all about: how to move to the next level.

I am very happy to see how all, including our friends in the private sector, are playing their parts to strengthen our nation's capabilities.

This Innovation for All Summit 2020 therefore comes at a very fitting time. I wish you all a great conference with fruitful interactions.

Before I end, I would like to the staff of my Ministry together with the staff of State Informatics Ltd and Huawei who have worked hard during the past weeks to make this event a reality.

On this note, I am now delighted to declare the Innovation for All Summit 2020 officially open.

Thank you for your attention.