

**SPEECH BY THE JUNIOR MINISTER OF FINANCE
HONOURABLE DHANESHWAR DAMRY**

On the occasion of the celebration of the World Customs Day

27th January 2025

H.E. Mr. Oskar Benedikt, Ambassador of the European Union to the Republic of Mauritius and to the Republic of Seychelles

Mr. Sudhamo Lal, G.O.S.K, C.S.K, Director General of the MRA

Mr. Badr Mouchine, Head of Programmes – EU – WCO HS and Rules of Origin Africa Programmes

MRA and Customs Officers

Members of the Press

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

All protocols observed

1. I feel honoured to be among you and to share my insights on the occasion of the World Customs Day 2025. I am new to government and it is a pleasure to get to know you better. There are now faces behind names and titles. We are ONE TEAM – TEAM MAURITIUS with the singular mission of contributing to the government programme 2025-2029, A Bridge to the Future!
2. The theme for this year's World Customs Day is "Customs delivering on its commitment to efficiency, security and prosperity".
3. Today, I will specifically address two multiplying enablers, digitalization of the customs and human resources.
4. When the people of Mauritius voted for l'Alliance du Changement, they had two priorities in mind.

- 4.1. First, make ends meet, prosper and live with dignity.
- 4.2. Second, live in peace, justice and liberty, where they can trust the institutions, where everyone is equal before the law.

5. We need to revitalize our ailing economy.

- 5.1. We need to set the country on a path of sustainable growth.
- 5.2. We must address the urgent need to redress public finances.

Our mission is to restore confidence and trust among the Mauritian population and investors, confidence and trust that the catastrophic economic mismanagement of Padanomics and the autocracy of the previous Prime Minister have eroded during the past ten years.

6. We are on a mission to reduce public sector debt to sustainable levels below the 83.4% as at June 2024.
7. We are on a mission to reduce inflation, especially food inflation, that has soared by 33% SINCE 2021.
8. For TEAM MAURITIUS to deliver on its mission to reduce debt and inflation, revenue is needed. This is where you, TEAM CUSTOMS, comes in. Each and every one of you contributes to providing the customs with a steady flow of income.
9. While you focus on increasing revenue collection, you must avoid the bottlenecks that slow down trade.
10. I am encouraged to see that the Mauritian customs is already engaged in digitalization initiatives that will raise the level of efficiency of service, aligning with today's theme for the International World Customs day, "Customs delivering on its commitment to efficiency, security and prosperity".
11. The launching of the e-Tariff project will facilitate access to information. Moreover, the E-certificate of origin, E-courier application and the mobile payments projects are commendable.
12. Without any doubt, technology can be a game changer for Customs. Digitalization of the customs will be a multiplier in the fight against

corruption, on the improvement of revenue collection and the reduction of bottlenecks.

13. Mauritius must emerge at the forefront of digitalization.
14. May I suggest that there is room for improvement. The World Bank's Logistics Performance Indicator 2023 report ranked Mauritius' Customs 90th out of 139 countries. In comparison, India ranked 47th and South Africa ranked 31st.
15. I'd like to seize this opportunity today to ask of you a PURPOSE.
16. Let's pledge to bring Mauritius customs to rank in the top half globally. Yes, the Top 50% in the world. Let this be our goal. Let's do it together!
17. In addition to its economic mandate, Customs owes a societal obligation, the fight against drugs, a scourge that has plagued Mauritius. We are at war against drugs! You are soldiers on the front!
18. Allow me to quote the great Chinese philosopher Sun Tsu, "warriors are those who choose to stand between the enemy and all that they love or hold sacred." Unquote.
19. You are on the first line of combat against drugs. The country relies on you, Customs Officers!
20. Dear Customs Officers, I am very well aware that you rely on this government to ensure institutional integrity and a fair human resources management.
21. I want to reassure each and every one of you, without any iota of doubt, that this government will rebuild institutional independence and institutional integrity.
22. As stated in paragraph 38 of our government programme 2025-2029, "A Bridge to the Future",
23. Quote, "To ensure adequate support to the New Economic Model, Government will rebuild the institutional strengths that have been the backbone of economic development and progress before being rendered ineffectual in the past decade." Unquote

24. Unfortunately, public perception has been that institutions pursued political agendas in the past decade.
25. Unsurprisingly, the nation has given this government an overwhelming mandate to bring a drastic change on the way the affairs of our country have been managed during the past ten years.
26. Therefore, institutional rebuilding will ensure that institutions serve their vision, mission and values. The rule of law and our constitutional rights will be diligently respected.
27. We will restore good governance, equal opportunities and the separation of powers.
28. Customs officers will be recruited and or promoted through merit and in full transparency. Discrimination and or harassment will not be tolerated at the workplace. There will be no political interference, no nepotism and no autocratic decision making.
29. A happy, committed, dedicated and motivated workforce will act as a catalyst for Customs to deliver on its commitment to efficiency, security and prosperity.
30. I would like to conclude by urging each and every one of you present here to embrace the digitalization of the customs and best human resources practices in the mission of making the customs a reference of institutional good governance, integrity, efficiency, security and prosperity.
31. I'd like to share a story about mission. President John Kennedy visited the premises of NASA during the program to send Apollo 11 to the moon. He came across a janitor, *l'équivalent d'un "planton" à Maurice*, carrying a broom down the corridor. He asked the janitor "What are you doing here?". The reply was simple but powerful, "I am helping to land a man on the moon".
32. TEAM CUSTOMS, you are a valuable part of TEAM MAURITIUS. You are a bridge to the future. Each one and every one of you within TEAM CUSTOMS, irrespective of your ranks and lines of responsibilities, is contributing to a far greater mission, to usher in a new dawn, a new era, a free and fair, an equitable and inclusive, a prosperous and sustainable Mauritius AS ONE PEOPLE AS ONE NATION.

33. Long Live Mauritius! Thank You!