Speech of Hon. Minister Mr. Etienne SINATAMBOU

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade
Acting Minister of Technology, Communication and Innovation

Infotech 2015 – 30 September 2015

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an immense pleasure and honour for me to be with you this evening on the occasion of the launching of the 22nd edition of Infotech, the largest ICT Event in Mauritius organised by the National Computer Board in collaboration with the Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation. Over the years, Infotech has made a valuable contribution to promoting ICT business and increasing awareness of IT in all spheres of life to the population at large.

Mauritius has, since long, recognised the importance and potential of adopting new technologies, matched with infrastructure, to accelerate the growth of a service led economy.
Our ICT sector is faring well, the ICT sector has become a resilient pole of growth, capable of transforming Mauritius into a high income economy. The ICT sector is currently the third pillar of the economy with a contribution to GDP of 6.4% in 2014 and according to forecasts, it can easily reach up to 7% for 2015. Moreover, employment in the sector stands at 19,242 and is bound to increase over the coming years.

This Government is fully aware of the huge potential of the ICT/BPO sector to catalyse in the creation of jobs and wealth. We are also setting up a conducive environment to further boost the sector and pro-actively remove all impediments.

In the first budget of this Government, the foundations for Mauritius to propel itself towards its next phase of development have been laid and it will be driven by Innovation. Mauritius, devoid of any natural resources and disadvantaged geographically, has always relied on its human resources and creativity to move forward. I am pleased to learn that a special Innovation Space has been set up in this edition of Infotech.

Allow me to quote from our Prime Minister’s speech in the context of Vision 2030 or ACHIEVING THE SECOND ECONOMIC MIRACLE AND VISION 2030:
“The Innovation, Technology and Communication sector is a key sector which is being graduated to the next level. This, in my view, would involve a series of initiatives. First and foremost, we have to move towards the provision of high end activities like software and animation development, big data analytics, disaster recovery and cloud computing, amongst others.”

In our bid to move towards a Smart Mauritius, comprising smart cities and technopoles of development, we are already taking strong measures to this effect. Let me remind you of some measures:

- In its bid to foster innovation, the 2015-2016 Budget makes provision, for the first time ever, of a sizable allocation of Rs 125 million towards the promotion of innovation, inventiveness and creativity in all spheres of our daily life through the ‘National Innovation Programme’

- By the end of this year, 385 free WiFi spots will be operational at key public places across the island in a bid to bridge the digital divide and to make internet a basic citizen’s right. Mauritius is also now one of the best-connected countries with 54.1% Internet penetration in the region, compared to the African continent’s rate standing at 13%.
Government’s vision for the deployment of high speed connectivity, through Fibre-To-The-Home and 4G island-wide coverage, is being implemented with the objective of attaining a Broadband Penetration of 60% by December 2015. Citizens and businesses will have quality online service round the clock.

In parallel to infrastructure development, Government wants also to invest in our youth. The scarcity or mismatch of skilled human resources to service our ICT/BPO sector has not been sufficiently addressed during the past years. Government is pro-actively addressing this skills shortage and has earmarked a budget of Rs 50 million for tailor made training programmes. The National Computer Board in collaboration with the Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation, has already initiated the first phase of these training programmes and has already secured the collaboration of major stakeholders such as IBM, Cisco, Oracle, Microsoft as well as industry associations represented by OTAM, MITIA and CCIFM.

Government can no longer afford high drop out rates in our educational system if we want to realize a Second Economic miracle driven by an innovation-led economy. In this context, all schools
will be equipped with the right and innovative educational technologies and tools as well as high speed Internet connectivity through the School Net II project.

• The implementation of the Highlands City project that has already been conceptualized is presently at the design phase and will start next year. The project of constructing a Technopark in Rose Belle has also been initiated. In fact, our Cyber City is already a role model for African countries. We have already signed an MOU with Ghana for the development of its first modern Cyber City.

• Government is also planning the Construction of a 4-Tier Data Centre and Disaster Recovery Centre in anticipation of exponential future growth of digital data and services.

Let me also highlight some of the recent initiatives of Government:

• There is a lot more to be done for delivery of e-services to our citizens, both in quantity and quality. The Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation will be signing an MOU, in the area of e-Governance, with Estonia which is a world leader in this field. The MOU will cover, inter alia, implementation of an array of e-
services, Cyber Security and protection of critical infrastructure and the setting up of a regional e-Governance Academy.

- Government recognizes the importance of technopreneurs and the role they will play in building a Smart Mauritius. To create a conducive ecosystem for high-tech and innovative entrepreneurs to develop their ideas and projects into profitable businesses, an ICT Incubator is being set up at Cyber Tower II in Ebène. It will be called the “La Plage Incubator/Accelerator” and will accommodate some 60 positions with 15 “accelerates” and 45 “incubates” in the first year of operation with the objective of attaining 45 “accelerates” and 15 “incubates” in the third year.

- Last but not least, we are all aware that in the future, a huge amount of services and social interactions will be through mobile platforms. To meet the increasing demand for highly skilled mobile platform developers, the Ministry of TCI is awarding 34 mobile applications development scholarships for unemployed IT graduates for a full year. The scholarship provides training, placement in enterprises and a monthly stipend of Rs 15,000.

With these few words I would like to commend the National Computer Board on the organization of Infotech 2015.
Thank you for your attention.