

No. 2 of 2002

RODRIGUES

FIRST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Debate No. 2 of 2002

Sitting of Friday 25 October 2002

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Mathurin at 10.30. a.m.

(Mr Chairperson in the Chair)

The National Anthem was played

RODRIGUES
FIRST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Friday 25 October 2002

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Proclamation No. 40 of 2002

**TO FIX THE PLACE, DATE AND TIME
AT WHICH THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY SHALL MEET
FOR THE PURPOSE OF SECTION 56
OF THE RODRIGUES REGIONAL ASSEMBLY ACT 2001**

KARL AUGUSTE OFFMANN
President of the Republic

KARL AUGUSTE OFFMANN –By Mr KARL AUGUSTE OFFMANN
Grand Commander of the Order of the Star
and Key of the Indian Ocean,
President of the Republic of Mauritius.

&c., &c., &c.

WHEREAS by section 71A of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (Amendment No. 2) Act 2002, it is enacted that the President may, by Proclamation, fix the place, date and time at which the Regional Assembly shall meet for the purpose of section 56 of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act.

NOW, THEREFORE, I do hereby proclaim that the first ordinary meeting of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly shall take place at the Rodrigues Regional Assembly at Port Mathurin on Friday 25 October 2002 at 10.30 a.m.

Given at Clarisse House, Vacoas, this 17th day of October, two thousand and two.

STATEMENT BY COMMISSIONERS

The Chief Commissioner (Mr J. D. Spéville): Mr Chairperson, distinguished Members of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, it is my privilege to welcome you today to the opening of the First Session of the First Regional Assembly – a significant point in the constitutional history of the Republic of Mauritius and in the political history of Rodrigues. The Supreme Law of the country now provides for the establishment of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly responsible for the formulation and implementation of policy in respect of matters set out in the Fourth Schedule of the related Act.

Before coming to the other items on the business, let us remind ourselves that during the 158 years that Mauritius was a Colony of the British Crown, Rodrigues has been administered as a Dependency of Mauritius, mostly forgotten and neglected, whose political status neither Mauritius itself nor Britain showed any inclination to advance. Rodrigues was kept under the domination of a colonizer (the Colonial Office) and a Colony (Mauritius) and as such Rodriguans were considered as second class colonised who had no say in the running of their affairs.

From the very beginning of constitutional development in Mauritius, Rodrigues have a moral right to be represented in order to have a say in the running of the rodriguan affairs being given that in the letters patent modifying the Constitution of the Council of Government in 1985 the Colony was defined as the Island of Mauritius and Dependencies.

The first general election under universal suffrage took place in 1958 in Mauritius and no arrangements whatsoever were made for the Rodriguans to vote in these elections.

While many changes were brought in the Constitution of Mauritius after the February 1964 Conference which was held at the Colonial Office and at which all the mauritian political parties were represented and at which they all agreed to form an all-party Government as a preliminary to the final granting of independence, a considerable number of representations were made in the Legislative Council calling for measures to extend franchise to Rodrigues.

Mr Chairperson, allow me on this historical day to make a special mention to the 79 Rodriguans who, in 1915 sent a memorandum to his Majesty, the King of England, as a first attempt to obtain direct representation for Rodrigues.

Rodrigues became constitutionally part of Mauritius when the latter became independent in 1968. Politically it is fully integrated. Physically, it cannot and will not be in a foreseeable future as it is situated at 680 kms to the North East of Mauritius. Furthermore, the people of Rodrigues have its own pattern of life and tradition.

It is my duty and pleasure to pay special tribute as well to Mr Louis Serge Clair, historical Leader of the people of Rodrigues, without whom, Mr Chairperson, no distinguished member present would have been sitting here in this House right now. His resolute struggle to obtain autonomy for Rodrigues and to promote the idea of Rodrigues as a separate entity with a capable people needs to be put on record as history cannot be erased at no point in time.

Obviously, he is the only political leader and last person who, immediately before Mr Robert Ahnee and Miss Antoinette Prudence to have signed the Chamber's distinguished visitors' book in year 2001 at the Council Chamber in Tobago as written by Mr Robert Ahnee in his report on the proposed decentralised system of Government for Rodrigues benchmarked on the decentralised system of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr Chairperson, expectations of the Rodriguans are now very high particularly since the establishment of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and with the list of criteria at section 46 of the Act to be taken into consideration by the Cabinet for a fair allocation of financial resources to the Regional Assembly. This suggests that this First Session of the First Regional Assembly will be a very busy one. It will also, no doubt, as right in a democracy, give rise to keen discussions for it is through full and free discussions that we arrive to just conclusions. However, I feel assured that whatever differences, respectful Members may have as to methods, there can be none about the major objective of us all: the safeguarding and improvement of standard of living of our people, wider opportunities of employment and the promotion of individual dignity.

This Assembly, Mr Chairperson, can only achieve its aim of improving and maintaining the standard of living *“si dès maintenant nous parvenons à jeter les bases pour une autonomie solide.”* It is hoped that external circumstances will be reasonably propitious because we should have in mind that it might happen that while the Rodrigues Regional Assembly proposes climatic, economic and political factors may dispose.

I now draw the attention of distinguished Members to some of the more important measures which you will be invited by my Commissioners to consider and approve during the course of the forthcoming sittings of this Session.

The consideration of the Draft Estimates for recurrent revenue and recurrent expenditure and capital revenue and capital expenditure for the 2003/2004 Financial Year will be the top priority of this House.

The implementation of a new development programme and the modification of our economic policies will require modern legislation to modify certain existing financial arrangements, procedures and institutions.

The Assembly will be asked to approve a revised development program covering the period 2002/2007 along with the First Draft Estimates for the next Financial Year. The revised Development Plan will both embrace those ongoing projects begun under the then Ministry of Local Government and Rodrigues and the new projects designed by my Commissioners of the Executive Council to implement the policies largely plebiscited in the September 2002 first regional election.

The Estimates which will be presented to the Assembly in a few weeks time will therefore contain provisions to enable a start to be made in the setting up of various organisations, for example, a consultative Economic and Social Council for the promotion of a participatory democracy in Rodrigues.

The Executive Council strongly believe that contrary to the top-down approach in development process, people within communities at grass root are best placed to make decisions that affect their own lives and that participatory approaches inherently build on skills, knowledge, experience and culture of community grouping in order to, as far as possible, engage them in designing and implementing their own development goals.

My Commissioners are fully conscious that in an autonomous Rodrigues young people should assume greater responsibilities and should play a more constructive role in the economy. A matter, which must be of concern to each and every Member of this Assembly as representatives of the people of Rodrigues, is the problem of unemployment. It is the policy of the Executive Council to create more employment opportunities through the development of entrepreneurship skills and the development of a strong private sector in Rodrigues.

The Executive Council is looking forward to review the instrument at our disposal, namely the Rodrigues Venture Capital Fund, the Development Bank of Mauritius and the SMIDO from which will be made available funds for more investment in productive sectors for the creation of productive employment.

The Council is likewise concerned to ensure the maximum utilisation of our land and water resource, with as chief aims the encouragement of increased local production of foodstuffs, a reduction in marketing costs and the stabilisation of the prices of locally consumed agricultural produce.

During the course of this session it will be necessary to decide, in light of the views expressed in the Assembly, to what extent it will be wise and practicable to adopt and carry the recommendations contained in the different reports available for various sectors of development in respect of the island.

The Executive Council will ensure that our land resources are properly managed within the framework of the National Physical Development Plan and taking into account the protection of agricultural areas, the conservation of our Rodriguan heritage, the development of key sectors of the economy and the judicious siting of secondary and tertiary activities. Special attention will be given to the protection of lagoon and coastal zone, cattle destocking, limiting grazing to defined pasture lands and the anti-erosion programme.

Mr Chairperson, it is imperative that the development of the tourism sector be planned ahead, bearing in mind the needs of the local population and norms and criteria for the development of tourist facilities as defined in the recommendations contained in the Master Plan for Tourism Development which will be examined by this Assembly before implementation. The organisation of major world events with high media exposure as well as the development of rural, cultural and eco-tourism will be undertaken.

Mr Chairperson, the Executive Council will place emphasis on the modernisation and upgrading of the Public Service in Rodrigues in the context of the introduction of the decentralised form of Government to make it much more responsive to the new needs and the aspirations of the people. Steps will be taken to improve managerial efficiency and the effectiveness in the local administration. An efficient local internal audit unit will be set up.

The Executive Council is further committed to provide training to all public officers at all levels to help them enhance their performance and will ensure that the Human Resource Centre is sufficiently equipped to meet the training needs of both local, public and private sectors.

Mr Chairperson, measures will be taken to alleviate the hardship faced by fishermen and to encourage them acquire the necessary skills and equipment for outer lagoon fishing. Procedures needed to get a registered card for obtaining bad

weather allowances will be simplified; people will be informed of proper procedures to be followed and guidance and support needed will be provided.

Mr Chairperson, the Council with all social partners will, as a matter of priority, promote a productivity and competitiveness culture at all levels. A Regional Productivity and Performance Council will be set up to better prepare our local citizens to the challenges of a strong economic sector and technological changes in the context of the globalisation.

Mr Chairperson, a Rodrigues Development Agency will be set up to create an enabling environment for economic development and to coordinate production activities, marketing and dealing with potential investors. The RDA will work closely with the Board of Investment. A one-stop-shop will also be set up to facilitate the life of investors.

Mr Chairperson, measures will be taken to enhance agricultural productivity and output. Conservation works will be improved, community pastures created, small scale irrigation and new production techniques introduced. The Executive Council will ensure a movement away from semi-subsistence agriculture and unprofitable cropping patterns to an increasingly market oriented economy to take advantage of the rising demand from the tourist market. A Rodrigues Farmers' Welfare Fund will be set up to assist planters and farmers victims of drought, cyclone or flooding.

Regulations will be introduced in the Assembly to regulate industrial relations, encourage the participation of workers and promote a permanent dialogue between management and trade unions.

A multi-disciplinary study should be carried out to analyse the real causes of the phenomenon of exclusion and marginalisation with a view to proposing a Marshall Plan to provide pathways out of income and human poverty for the poorer section of the local community.

The Executive Council will simplify procedures for contracting a loan at the DBM so as to encourage women heads of households to set up their own small businesses or 'micro-projects' in handicraft, baskets, weaving, pickles, honey, embroideries, etc. each involving a group of women. They should be given basic training in marketing and all necessary information including legal and financial, prior to the launching of small businesses/micro projects. The National Handicraft Promotion Agency will assist in getting a market in Mauritius and abroad for their products.

Mr Chairperson, it is a fact that some parents are not motivated to send their children to school as they are themselves uneducated and do not understand the importance of educating their children, or worst still, parents are alcoholics and neglect their children. A Regional Children Council will be set up for the purpose of looking after the welfare and rights of children. The Executive Council will encourage the setting up of “village nurseries” to allow children to attend school to look after their siblings. Working children will be encouraged to follow training and a stipend will be given to them to encourage them leaving their low remunerated works.

The medical services will be further decentralised and modernised with a view to rendering them more accessible to the poorer classes of our local citizens. A patients’ charter will be introduced to enable health consumers to have access to an efficient and equitable health service. There is an urgent need for sexual education and knowledge of contraception to all adolescents and teenagers and specially girls in villages so that they do not end becoming pregnant. Mobile medical facilities and doctors’ visits to elderly people who cannot travel should be more regular. Appropriate rehabilitation and health programme will be developed for each group of disabled person.

The Executive Council will also encourage the setting up of private health institutions.

Distinguished Members will agree with me that there is a large inadequacy of facilities and amenities for the disabled in Rodrigues. The Executive Council will take steps to provide new infrastructure to satisfy the needs of the disabled. Specialised training will be provided to NGO Members working with the physically handicapped to increase their abilities to care for the disabled.

The Executive Council will pay special attention to the plight of ex-servicemen who, by their participation at different levels in the Second World War, have honoured Rodrigues.

The Executive Council will identify all our cultural acquisition, organise and execute cultural projects of different nature and set up an Artist Welfare Fund. An Arts and Culture Advisors Committee will also be set up to advise the Executive Council on cultural policies. A school of music, an auditorium and a museum will also be set up.

Mr Chairperson, the Executive Council will, in the area of leisure, take into consideration the specific needs and constraints of various groups of people and individuals. Young people will be provided greater facilities to be initiated with

the arts and other hobbies. The existing set-up in the youth and sports sector will be reviewed. Encouragement will be given to our sports elite to enable them to reach higher performance. The Executive Council will look into the creation of easily accessible sports infrastructure in all regions. Consideration will also be given to addressing the needs and aspirations of underprivileged young people as a mean for rehabilitation. The Executive Council will ensure that technical training becomes a permanent necessity in sport. The participation of our elite at national, regional and international level will be encouraged.

Mr Chairperson, the provision of decent housing to each family will be a key priority of the Executive Council. Towards this end a comprehensive programme of housing development aimed at responding especially to the housing needs of low and middle income groups will be elaborated and implemented. People will be encouraged to invest in more traditional buildings which suit the local topography. Constructions may consist of concrete but mixed with timber frame clad with steel sheeting and pitched corrugated iron sheet roofs. Given that Rodrigues is a water deficit area, legislation will be introduced to incorporate rainwater harvesting devices and water storage tanks in the design of buildings for the grant of building permit. One must also be encouraged to consider how to adapt the construction with the site and not vice versa so as to avoid visual obstructiveness.

As our public transport system does not adequately respond to the need of the island, the Executive Council will come up with a Rodrigues Transport Policy which will *inter alia* review the organisational set-up of individual buses. Buses should run till 0800 p.m. at latest. In fact, transport problem in Rodrigues is closely linked with the poor road infrastructure. As a regional measure, a proper road infrastructure will be developed. Efforts already ongoing will be intensified and accelerated and provision made for parking facilities. A full-fledge vehicle examination centre will be set up.

The Executive Council will encourage efforts to optimise the use of renewable sources of energy such as wind and solar energy. Energy saving habits among consumers will be actively promoted.

Mr Chairperson, the Executive Council will review the structure and management of the water sector with a view to greater co-ordination and effectiveness. Major investment will be made in infrastructure for water resource development. The quality of drinking water, the reduction of losses on the network as well as an efficient irrigation system will be given greater attention. Facilities will be offered to households for increasing production and water storage through

rainwater harvesting and storage. A Master Plan on water will be elaborated and implemented.

Major infrastructural works for the extension of the Plaine Corail Airport, apron and improvement of the terminal is under way. Particular emphasis will be laid on provision for the safety and security of passengers. This new development will be a boost to the development of the tourism sector. The shopping facilities at the airport should continue to include a wide range of gift items of local handicraft and produce but on a wider scale. The Executive Council will recommend that the airport should fulfil its purpose of providing an easy customer friendly interface between airside and landside, with sufficient space provided for passengers, their families and friends.

Mr Chairperson, the harbour is still lacking in some facilities. The Executive Council will ensure that plans are prepared for developing these facilities because of the forthcoming industrial and tourism development which will involve additional sailing.

With the development of the fishing industry, the facilities at Port Sud Est will be upgraded – port as well as storing facilities

The Fisheries Research and Training Unit will be reorganised for resumption of its activities. A Rodrigues Welfare Fisherman Fund, a Craftman Welfare Fund and a Rodrigues Student Welfare Fund will also be respectively set up.

A telecommunication plan will be prepared for Rodrigues. As good communication is absolutely essential for modern business and for Rodrigues to attract new development, it is essential that the telecommunication system is expanded to meet anticipated demand.

Mr Chairperson, efforts to protect and preserve the quality of the marine environment will be further reinforced. A Coastal and Marine Conservation and Management Projects aimed at monitoring the quality of the environment and the establishment of marine parks and the coastal zone management plan will be extended.

Distinguished Members, a real partnership between Central Government and the Regional Assembly will be promoted. A Bill will be introduced in the Rodrigues Regional Assembly for the setting up of a Rodrigues Regional Service Commission to be benchmarked on the Local Government Service Commission to enable the Executive Council of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to have adequate control over staff matters.

Drainage systems and waste disposal will be improved and socially and culturally acceptable public sanitary facilities provided.

A scholarship system will be devised specially for Rodrigues and implemented. More amenities and facilities should be made available in primary and secondary schools. Students should be made aware of all opportunities and choices in life that higher education can provide them so as to help them to change their attitude of low expectation from life and low self-esteem. Psychologists, successful businessmen and career guidance experts should be invited to schools to give talks to students.

The numerous strategies and policy objectives enunciated today will prepare us to *construire les bases solides d'une ile rodrigues autonome*. With this first mandate, the OPR Executive Council will strive with unflinching commitment to achieve the goals of economic development and social justice in the interest of the rodriguan people and the nation at large. A new era is emerging, characterised by empowerment of the local people, participatory democracy, high standards of transparency and public accountability, a deep sense of fair play and good governance with a dynamic leadership close to the aspiration of the common people.

M. le président, l'autonomie acquise maintenant est le fruit d'une longue lutte menée par l'Organisation du Peuple de Rodrigues. Nous avons mené la lutte pendant 25 ans. Nous avons la vision. Nous avons l'intelligence. Nous avons l'expérience. Nous avons la volonté de construire les bases solides pour une ile Rodrigues autonome. Nous avons la jeunesse d'esprit. Nous avons la volonté de réussir et nous réussirons.

Mr Chairperson, distinguished Members, I pray that the blessing of the Almighty may rest upon your counsels.

MOTIONS
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE –
NOMINATION OF MEMBERS

The Chief Commissioner: Mr Chairperson, Sir, I beg to move the motion standing in my name on the Order Paper and which reads as follows –

“This Assembly is opinion that, in accordance with Standing Order 63 of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Standing Orders and Rules, there are elected the following four Members to sit on the Public Accounts Committee –

- (1) Mr Jean Christian AGATHE
- (2) Miss Marie Lindsay CASTEL
- (3) Mr Louis Philippe FRANCOIS
- (4) Mr Jacques PIERRE LOUIS, Deputy Chairperson

This is a motion which is self-explanatory; it takes into account Standing Order 63 of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Standing Orders and Rules which provide for the composition of the Public Accounts Committee.

It has been decided, by consensus, that Mr Jean Christian AGATHE, Miss Marie Lindsay CASTEL, Mr Louis Philippe FRANCOIS and Mr Jacques PIERRE LOUIS be elected to serve on the Public Accounts Committee. I am confident, Mr Chairperson, Sir, that the Members aforementioned will perform their duties diligently and will be up to expectations. Obviously, Mr Chairperson, Sir, you would move to appoint a chairperson for the Public Accounts Committee.

With these remarks, Mr Chairperson, Sir, I commend the motion to this House.

Ms Perrine-Bégué rose and seconded.

Mr Chairperson: It would appear that there is no objection on this side and unless Members have anything to add, I will put the question.

On question put, the motion was agreed to.

I will keep the House informed, in due course, of the chairperson that would have been appointed by me to chair the Public Accounts Committee.

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE – NOMINATION OF MEMBERS

The Chief Commissioner: Mr Chairperson, Sir, I beg to move the second motion standing in my name on the Order Paper and which reads as follows –

“This Assembly is of opinion that, in accordance with Standing Order 64 of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Standing Orders and Rules thee are elected the following three Members to sit on the Standing Orders Committee –

- (1) Ms Arlette PERRINE-BEGUE, Deputy Chief Commissioner*
- (2) Mr André Lélío ROUSSETY, Commissioner*
- (3) Mr Johnson ROUSSETY, Minority Leader*

This motion is also self-explanatory; it takes into account Standing Order 64 (1) of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Standing Orders and Rules which provides for the election and composition of the Standing Orders Committee, and by consensus it has been decided that Mrs Arlette PERRINE-BEGUE, Mr André Lélío ROUSSETY and Mr Johnson ROUSSETY be elected to serve on the Standing Orders Committee.

With these remarks, Mr Chairperson, Sir, I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Sooprayen rose and seconded.

Mr Chairperson: It would appear that there is no objection from the other side. Unless Members have anything to add, I will put the question.

On question put, the motion was agreed to.

HOUSE COMMITTEE – NOMINATION OF MEMBERS

The Chief Commissioner: Mr Chairperson, Sir, I beg to move the third and last motion standing in my name which reads as follows –

“This Assembly is of opinion that in accordance with Section 59(5)(f) of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act 2001, there are appointed the following nine Members to sit on a House Committee to be styled the House Committee for the comfort and convenience of the Regional Assembly –

- (1) Miss Marie Lindsay CASTEL*
- (2) Mr Louis Philippe FRANCOIS*
- (3) Mr Franceau GRANDCOURT*
- (4) Mr Gaetan JABEEMISSAR*
- (5) Mr Robertson MERCURE*
- (6) Mrs Marie Thérèse MEUNIER*
- (7) Mr Jacques PIERRE LOUIS, Deputy Chairperson*
- (8) Mrs Jacqueline PROSPER*
- (9) Mr André Lélío ROUSSETY, Commissioner*

This is a motion which is self-explanatory; it takes into account section 59(5)(f) and paragraph 1 of the Sixth Schedule of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act 2001 which provides for the composition of a Standing Committee.

It has been decided, by consensus, that the abovenamed Members be elected to serve on the House Committee.

I am confident, Mr Chairperson, Sir, that the Members will perform their duties diligently and will be up to expectation.

By virtue of paragraph 9 of the sixth Schedule of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act, Sir, the House Committee will ultimately elect a chairperson and a deputy chairperson.

With these remarks, Mr Chairperson, Sir, I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Lisette rose and seconded.

Mr Chairperson: It would appear that there is no objection from the other side. Unless Members have anything to add, I will put the question.

On question put, the motion was agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chief Commissioner: Mr Chairperson, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 05 November 2002 at 10.30 a.m.

Ms Perrine-Bégué rose and seconded.

The Minority leader (Mr J. Roussety): Mr Chairperson, before the adjournment of the Assembly, I would like to draw the attention of the House to section 59 (5) of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act 2001 providing for the setting up of five Standing Committees: a Finance Committee, a Public Health and Environment Committee, a Works, Planning and Development Committee, An Education, Culture, Welfare, Sports and Leisure Committee, a Committee of the whole Regional Assembly.

The respectful Chief Commissioner has stressed in his speech that...

Mr Chairperson: Mr Roussety, be brief, please.

Mr Roussety: I would like to draw the attention of the House to the fact that there is provision for these Committees under section 59 (5) of the Act and that they should be set up in the near future.

Mr Chairperson: Of course, you will be given time to make a statement in order to give more explanation.

At 11.15 a.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 05 November 2002 at 10.30 a.m.