

No. 13 of 2006

RODRIGUES

FIRST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Debate No. 13 of 2006

Sitting of Friday 18 August, 2006

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

(Mr. Chairperson in the Chair)

The National Anthem was played

RODRIGUES REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

TUESDAY Friday 18 August, 2006

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ADJOURNMENT

**The Executive Council
(Formed by Mr. Johnson Roussety)**

Mr. Johnson Roussety	Chief Commissioner, Commissioner responsible for Central Administration, Civil Aviation (administration), Civil Status, Customs & Excise, Handicraft, Industrial, Development, Information Technology and Telecommunications, Judicial (administration), Legal Services, Marine Parks, Meteorology (administration), Registration, State lands, Statistics in respect of Rodrigues, Tourism and Town and Country Planning.
Mr. Gaetan Jabeemissar	Deputy Chief Commissioner, Commissioner responsible for Consumer Protection, Co-operatives, Education (administration), Library services, Trade, Commerce and Licensing and Vocational Training.
Mr. Robertson Mercure	Commissioner responsible for Arts and Culture, Employment, Labour and Industrial Relations, Museums, Archives, Historical Sites and Buildings, Youth and Sports
Mr. Franceau Aubret Grandcourt	Environment, Fisheries, Forestry, Housing, Infrastructure including Highways and roads and Public Buildings and Utilities, Marine parks and Transport.
Mrs. Marie Thérèse Clair	Child Development, Family Welfare, Social Security (administration) and Women's Affairs.
Mr. Jean Christian Agathe	Agriculture, Food Production, Plant and Animal Quarantine and Water Resources.
Miss. Marie Lindsay CASTEL	Community Development, Fire Services, Health (administration), Postal Services (administration) and Prisons and Reform Institutions (administration)

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

Mr. Chairperson	-	Lamvohee, Mr. Joseph Chenlye
Clerk	-	Vithilingem, Mr. Soocramanien
Serjeant -at-Arms	-	Louis, Mr. Jorgenson

ANNOUNCEMENT

Chairperson: Respected members, I have the following announcement to make:-

In relation to the vacant Island Region seat, the Electoral Commissioner, Mr. Irfan Abdool Rahman has, by letter dated 9th August 2006 faxed to me, informed me that the four remaining Party List Members on the OPR list qualified to fill the vacancy, have all signified their unwillingness to serve as Member for the Island Region and that consequently the seat left vacant by Mr. Jacques Pierre Louis of the OPR shall remain vacant until the next ordinary election.

I am tabling the letter for future references. (*Appendix A*)

Thank you.

STATEMENTS BY COMMISSIONERS

(i) Chief Commissioner: Mission to Mauritius

The Chief Commissioner (Mr. Johnson Roussety): Mr. Chairperson, Sir, I wish to appraise the House of developments following my mission to Mauritius, accompanied by Commissioner Grandcourt, regarding two issues. The first issue is the fishermen's Bad Weather Allowance and the second issue is the selling price of ration rice, subsidised price in Rodrigues. So, I am please to announce the House that we have met three ministers, Hon. Arvin Boolell, Hon. Jeetah, with whom we have had very interesting sessions of work and we have paid also a courtesy call to the Hon. Valayden. We have also had very interesting and promising meetings regarding investment promotion and the setting up of the business and the Business and Investment Promotion Unit that my commission, the office of the Chief Commissioner wants to set up to attract investment, the most business making in Rodrigues. With your permission, I would appraise the House briefly of the tenure of these meetings.

The first issue for which we had to deal was the issue of the Bad Weather Allowance with Honorable Boolell. We have submitted a brief explaining the critical situation of the fishermen and their families in Rodrigues and in this brief we have proposed to make proposals that the new criteria of the Bad Weather Allowance be revised in ;line with the reality of Rodrigues.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, I was surprised to learn that the voice of Rodrigues and the fishermen community of Rodrigues has not been voiced out appropriately before the decision to modify criteria has been taken.

In a meeting in June 2006, organised by the Ministry of Fisheries, Agro-Industry, etc, the representative for Rodrigues gave his approval, gave the approval of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly for the modification of the criteria of the Bad Weather Allowance without consultation, Mr. Chairperson, Sir. So, the minister and the ministry took as if it was this decision, the proposals have been accepted after consultations. No study of the impact of the new Fishermen Allowance criteria was made. This decision was made overnight, without taking into consideration what will be the impact on the revenues, on the financial situations of fishermen. And worse of it Mr. Chairperson, Sir, this decision was made overnight, without preparing the fishermen for a transition, for a sort of remodeling to reassign themselves to other activities. Fishermen in Rodrigues are not ready yet, we need time; we expressed our views, we need time transform the fishermen community to prepare them to go towards what we want to set up - the Sea Food Hub.

So, the views of Rodrigues have not been expressed by the former Executive Council. This decision has been accepted blindly, and in this regard I have the *acquis* of the welfare of the fishermen community. And this is what we made the Honourable Minister to understand and he took it positively that may be this decision was implemented overnight without consulting the fishermen community. And the fault, Mr. Chairperson, Sir – we must say it – the fault is on the back of the former Executive Council, the former Commissioner responsible for Fisheries, the ex-Chief Commissioner who gave his approval, Mr. Chairperson, Sir; who gave his approval to this new scheme without consulting. They have been speaking about “*démocratie participative*” and the just gave their approval overnight, the fishermen community is taken by surprise.

So, we have asked, Mr. Chairperson, Sir, that this criteria, we have submitted a proposal so that this criteria be given attention, we have expressed our view that the social situation following the introduction of this bad weather allowance in Rodrigues is critical. We have seen what have happen with public protest of the Fishermen when these criteria have been modified. This is normal because the Fishermen are depending on this money to pay their loans, to pay electricity Bills, to buy food for themselves, to buy food for their families.

So, we don't say that Fisherman should continue to benefit, we say that there is need for transition. This is what we have expressed with the Minister of Fisheries. They are awaiting for a positive response on this issue. We have been made to understand that it is a Cabinet decision and Cabinet needs to reexamine the matter and to review the situation.

However, Mr. Chairperson Sir, my Commission of Finance in collaboration with the Commission of Fisheries, we have been sensitive to the situation being face by the Fishermen Committee and we have top up the last payment which was made in the different four regions. We have top up to one thousand.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, I am an Economist all members of my executive know what I am speaking. We have set around and we have seen that with the new criteria, only one third may be only ten million rupees out of 27 million rupees will be used. What we do when the money is available? Will we use only ten million or around ten million? And leave the rest of the money idle and lost on the budget or will we be sensitive to the cases of these fishermen and provide to them a sort of transition period. They can in the transition period remodel their activities and renew, redirect their professional activities.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir. We understand that this position is to remove pressure on the lagoon, but the indirect effect is coming back when we don't pay enough or when these Fishermen allowances have been reduce, there is more poverty in the Fishermen community leaving to more illegal practices, leaving to more destruction of the environment, Mr. Chairperson, Sir. These decisions have been made out of respect of the Fishermen Community, without any consultation, Mr. Chairperson Sir, and in disrespect I would say of the autonomy of Rodrigues. We have an Executive Council here and I think, there should be latitude for this Executive Council to apt, Mr.

Chairperson, Sir. We don't want this country to be turned upside down, we'll take the decisions before the matters arise.

So, I would like to say that Rodrigues is not a Government Departments; the Rodrigues Regional Assembly is not a department. It is an autonomous body decentralised system of Government, which is in the constitution of the Republic of Mauritius and there should be latitude, Mr. Chairperson, Sir, for us here to know what are the problems, to know what are the sufferings of the people to devise mechanism and means to help them of course we have assured that we will stay in our budget.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, I think I am praise to announce that we will continue to help the Fishermen community with an appropriate within the budget, Mr. Chairperson, Sir, after following all financial procedures within the budget, I will take the responsibility with consultation with the Commissioner for Finance. Within the budget we are prepared to continue to pay without exceeding the budget, we have to stay in our budget in this financial year. We are prepared to pay a social assistance out of the remaining money, which will not be used to pay bad weather allowance.

So, we are prepared to top up the Fishermen allowance which we will not call it bad weather allowance, we will call it a social allowance to professional Fishermen and I think that this may reach around 800 or 900 or may be 1000 rupees depending on the finalisation of this issue.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir. The problems of Fishermen in Rodrigues are not the same as Fishermen in Mauritius. In Mauritius, there are alternative employment activities for Fishermen. There are Fishermen who can go on the banks, there are Fishermen who can go in the fishing boats which are available everywhere in Mauritius. They can have employment on this and there are alternative employment opportunities in factories, on farms as Divers etc. But in Rodrigues all these alternative employment opportunities are unavailable. This is why the problem of the Fishermen community in Rodrigues is not the same as the problem of the Fishermen community in Mauritius and we need a special attention, a special solution for the Fishermen of Rodrigues.

But we say, the Government is not going to continue to pay the bad weather allowance over the long term. We will devise a solution to accompany socially Fishermen with a smaller amount being paid like we have done

lastly of our first decision to support them in the transition pending we create alternative employment opportunities for them, Mr. Chairperson, Sir.

The second meeting we have was with Mr. Geeta and we have submitted to him a brief on the price of rice and flour in Mauritius and Rodrigues and again he has promise to see to it with the Ministry of Finance that we have the same price of rice and flour as is in Mauritius. The difference the cost of freight per year will be around 6 million rupees per year for both freight of rice and flour to Rodrigues and again we are expecting a positive solution and we have said that out of our revenue here we can try to provide part of the financial assistance necessary to meet that scheme.

We have also met Mr. Hourouble Vallyden and there we have discuss he is agreeable to it, that we have a permanent Magistrate being domiciled in Rodrigues because there are new laws, specially to family matters whether is sometime a necessity to have a Magistrate at hand to take decision judicial matters and he of course agreed that there will be a new system where about there will be a permanent Magistrate on the Island to help in the administration of justice. The Rodrigues Regional Assembly will provide quarters and all necessary amenities, facilities will be standed to the Magistrate to be posted in Rodrigues.

We have also met the Honourable Baichoo, the courtesy call and he also has promised to visit us as soon as he will be in a position to do it and to see how his Ministry will be in a position to help Rodrigues. On the business and investment sight we have explain our vision to create a Business and Investment Promotion Unit and we have had a very interesting meeting with Mr. Darga of Enterprise Mauritius and Mr. Darga has agreed that Enterprise Mauritius will collaborate in the setting up of the Business and Investment Promotion Unit at the Chief Commissioner's Office and he has even promise to try to recruit somebody here who will be the focal point of Enterprise Mauritius in Rodrigues. So, this will be a very great help to those entrepreneurs trying to find markets, restructuring their businesses etc.

We have also met Mr. Rajoo JADOO, Managing of the Board Investment who said Mr. Chairperson, Sir, four times, they wanted to come here consulted the former Executive Council, four times I think their missions has been cancelled, Mr. Chairperson, Sir. This is the attention that were given to investment professional by the ex Executive Council. So, the Board of Investment also will delegate somebody, there is a desk officer who has been designated, to be our contact person there to help us in setting up the

Business Investment and Promotion Unit shortly. We are expecting that there will be a visit on the Board of Investment around mid September as well as that the Chairman of Enterprise Mauritius, Mr. Darga.

So, we have also, Mr. Chairperson, Sir, as Commissioner for Tourism attended a Promotion Exercise and this has been very fruitful at the Miss Mauritius Contest last night and I think that the repercussion on Tourism for Rodrigues will be undoubtedly positive to have brought young dancers and I think those members who were enough courageous to wait for the end of the show, could have seen these artist performing and I think our mission in Mauritius has been fruitful. But, I repeat Mr. Chairperson, Sir, that there is need for the autonomy of Rodrigues to work for the people of Rodrigues. There is need for the Executive Council of Rodrigues to have latitude to take decisions within the budgetary parameter for the Welfare of all Communities Fishermen, all stakeholders in the Rodrigues society.

So, we have had very positive meetings and we hope that development will follow shortly.

Thank you

(Applause)

(ii) Deputy Chief Commissioner: Vote of thanks to the Mouvement Rodriguais

Mr. G. JHABEEMISSAR: Mr. Chairperson Sir, before I move with the statement concerning my Commission properly, allow me to say a few word of thanks to those concern with my election as Deputy Chief Commissioner and the assignment to me of other Commissions. At the very outset, allowed me to say a very special word of thanks to my party for the great confidence placed in me by offering me the portfolio of Deputy Chief Commissioner. Such confidence Mr. Chairperson, Sir, has always been manifest in my leader, Honourable, Nicolas Vonmally and the President Honourable, Christian Leopold to whom I am eternally grateful. I am also grateful to the political bureau of the Movement Rodriguais which has since my joining the party shown great confidence in me. My special thanks also goes to the Chief Commissioner, my good friend Johnson Roussety, who has chosen me to be his Deputy. In so doing, he acknowledges his great confidence in me. I

also extend the same thanks to my colleagues the Commissioners as well as my other colleagues, members namely Mrs. Prosper, Mr. Emilien and Mr. Guillaume for their kind support to me during my election as Deputy Chief Commissioner on the day of the swearing in ceremony. Last but not least, I must not forget to thank the Honourable Prime Minister and his Excellency the President of the Republic of Mauritius for their invaluable help and presence in the organisation of the swearing in ceremony held on the 4th August last.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, I'll fail in my duty if I don't also congratulate my two friends, the Commissioners Robertson Mercure and Lindsay Castel for their courageous decision to support our political views and their adherence to our party.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, today's political situations in our Island wouldn't have been possible without their courage. I therefore in the name of the Movement Rodriguais and in my own name, thank them again heartedly.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, two weeks back Rodrigues experience the worst political episode of its history. The previous Regional Government which promised in 2002, that he would bring this country to real development by addressing the chronic evil such as unemployment, economic growth and social stability conceded their defeat by giving up their seats in this assembly.

Today Mr. Chairperson, Sir, its very regretful to see that this house is operating without of an opposition. This is the role which we have been very proud to play during the last four years and without which the country will still be far behind. This house Mr. Chairperson, Sir, will recall the number to times, we as the then minority group urged the Regional Government to either change their policies when these were tantamount to putting at state the welfare of our fellow citizen or when meritocracy wasn't respected. We can therefore say that we are very proud of our contribution to the political change of our country. That why Mr. Chairperson Sir, when the opportunity of Governing the affairs of this country were given to us, we didn't hesitate to take up the challenge. The enthusiasm which our followers and the population at large showed during the swearing in ceremony and our gathering at Mourouck last week were are clear indications that most people of Rodrigues were waiting for these political changes to come.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, the first week was indeed very tough, since I had at the same time put order in my Commissions and also to receive members of the public who came for their personal problems. I immediately came to know that many important decisions had remained pending by the previous Regional Government, namely Scholarship offered by foreign countries to our HSC students of last year, graduate and post graduate courses, trade licenses, filling of post etc, all these has been remain pending. I therefore spent these two last weeks going through the different files to know what have been the reasons for the non-executions of the different projects I have just mentioned.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, the first challenge I had to face was the problem of the scholarship of the last year's HSC students. Two of them were awarded the Indian Cultural Scholarship and up to now nothing has been decided for them. I personally got into communication with Minister Dharam Gokhool in order to know what the problem was. He promised me to look into the matter, but it seems that the problem lies with the Indian Government because no communication with them has been entertained. I was very impressed to see so many people at my Commission on the very start of my mandate as Commissioner for Education to seek help and this gives us an indication how people were relying on us to solve their problems.

In spite of the fact that many important issues in the Commission of Education, need the direct intervention of the Minister of Education. I am confident we are going to get positive result in the days to come. In fact, the Minister Gokhool has just informed my Commission that he is visiting us in September next.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir. Following my assumption at office as Deputy Chief Commissioner and Commissioner responsible for Education, Training, Trade Commerce and Licensing, Consumer Protection, Library Services and Cooperatives on 4th August 2006, I wish to inform the house of the following developments pertaining to my Commissions.

(i) Constitution of the board of Directors of the Rodrigues Educational Company the REDCO, the house may be aware the government has entrusted the management and control of REDCO Colleges to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly since July 2006. The Rodrigues Regional Assembly as majority shareholder is proceeding with the constitution of the new board of directors of REDCO and their appointment of corporate and

Secretarial Accounting Services. The meeting of Directors and Shareholders will be held shortly.

(ii) Regarding Examinations. The delegation from the Mauritius Examination Syndicate headed by the Director Professor Lucien Finett was on official visit to Rodrigues from 10 to 11 July 2006. Professor Finett had a meeting with the Departmental Head on the organisation and conduct of examination in Rodrigues. On 11 July a briefing session was organised on CPU Report 2005 for all Certificate of Primary Education Teachers. The briefing session was conducted by the Professors of the MES on five core subjects.

(iii) We have had the opportunity to welcome a mission from the Society for the welfare of the deaf. The mission was headed by Mr. Hookoomsing, who called at my Commission on Tuesday 8 August 2006. The objective of the mission was to look into the issue of inserting into the dictionary, which is the Mauritian sign language some signs specific to the Rodriguan context. Training for Teachers and a survey for pupils at Primary level having deaf problems was also discussed. My Commission was informed that each family having a child with hearing empowerment may benefit from a donation of the Mauritian Sign Language Dictionary. A copy of the dictionary was offered to the Commission by the Delegation.

(iv) Capital Projects; The construction two community schools at Mont Charlot and Arocaria are on going and the works are in progress. This project for a value of 50, 267 661 million rupees started in May 2006 and is scheduled for completion in May 2007.

(v) The School IT Project; I wish to inform the house that the Ministry of Education and Human Resources have donated 65 computers and 30 Printers and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly have provided 51 Computers and 3 Printers for IT School Project. The distribution of five computers and 1 printer to each Primary school is ongoing and will be completed by the next week. On these word Mr. Chairperson, Sir, I thank you for your attention.

(Applause)

Chairperson: Yes, Commissioner.

(iii) Commissioner R. Mercure:

Commissioner R. Mercure: Mr. Chairperson, Sir,

Friday 4th August 2006 will be a land mark in the history of the autonomous Rodrigues when a new Chief Commissioner and a new team had sworn in before the President of the Republic of Mauritius to serve the people of our beloved island. The swearing in of the members of the third Executive Council of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly as well as the election of the Deputy Chairperson had created new opportunities to improve the living conditions of the Rodriguan population when all of us have taken a pledge to serve our beloved country and be at the disposal of our mandate when the “politique de proximité” has become our motto.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, in the light of new socio economic, political, and cultural environment created from the very day of our swearing in, new responsibilities have been assigned to each Commissioner. I therefore heartfully thanked the Chief Commissioner for having placed his trust and confidence in me by conferring upon me the responsibilities of the port-folio of Arts and Culture, Youth and Sports, Labour and Industrial Relations, Employment, Museums, Archives, Historical Building and Others.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, having assumed duties as the new Commissioner of Arts and Culture, Youth and Sports, Labour and Industrial Relations, Employment, Museums, Archives, Historical Building and Others, immediate actions were initiated to carry out the activities of my Commission with a view to satisfying the needs of our mandate, namely,

artists, animators, youngsters, athletes, sportsmen, coaches, workers, employers, the unemployed and the population at large.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, with a view to expediting matters, the following appropriate action has been made:

Arts and Culture

- (i) Setting up of :-
 - (a) The Artist Assistance Scheme Committee
 - (b) Rodrigues Day Committee
 - (c) Festival Creole Committee
- (ii) Display of SADC flags (one SADC flag + 14 member state flags at Port Mathurin on Thursday 17 August 2006)
- (iii) Holding of a photography exhibition at Northcoombes Building will be on Monday 21 August 2006

Labour and Industrial Relations

Sponsorship of Mr. Joseph Shane Berty ETIENNE at the University of Mauritius as from 14 August 2006 to a three year part time Diploma course in Occupational Health and Safety. Subsequently, arrangements were made for the placement of Mr. Etienne at the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations during his enrolment period at the University of Mauritius.

The Labour and Industrial Relations Squad has been reactivated to ensure that all provisions of the law pertaining to Labour, wages, remuneration orders, health and safety are being respected by both the employees and the employers at work sites. Regular inspections are being carried out.

Employment

Actions have been initiated to have an updated statistic of unemployed as well as the number of expatriate workers in Rodrigues.

Youth and Sports

Launching of International Youth Day 2006 by film projection and talk on poverty at Batatran Community Centre on Monday 7 August 2006.

On Wednesday 9 August 2006 three “caisses de la jeunesse” were launched at La Ferme, Malabar and Grande Montagne whereby some 47 youths were provided with micro credit facilities of Rs 4,000 each to enable them to start their small enterprises/businesses. It aims at empowering our youth as stated in the speech of the Chief Commissioner.

Another film projection and talk on poverty were carried out at Cité Patate on Friday 11 August 2006.

On Saturday 12 August 2006, a conference debate and the final of the debate on poverty were held at the Conference Room of the Malabar Gymnasium in the presence of the Chief Commissioner whereby some 150 youths attended the debate.

The donation of equipment by the Rodrigues Youth Council to the Young Garments Multipurpose Cooperative Society of Cyganges to start its trading business effected on the occasion.

Sports

Mr. Chairperson, Sir,

Sports have always been at my heart and this spirit has compelled me to effect site visits to the sports infrastructures so as to have a clear aperçu of the situation. Visits were effected to different sports grounds. Decision will be taken to upgrade these sports infrastructures in due course. Other visits will follow.

I am fully confident that this new team will not leave any stones unturned in its endeavour to improve the living conditions of the population. The recent decision of the Executive Council to grant Rs 1000 to all registered professional fishermen and our intention to bring the price of rice and flour on the same level as in Mauritius are clear indications of our strong determination to fight poverty in Rodrigues.

Than you, Mr. Chairperson, Sir.

(Applause)

Chairperson: Any other Commissioners to address? Yes, we move on.

Clerk: Motions. No, motions.

Chairperson: All items exhausted, a motion for adjournment, please?

ADJOURNMENT

Chief Commissioner (Mr. J. ROUSSETY): Yes, Mr. Chairperson Sir, I move that the Assembly be adjourned to Tuesday 5 September 2006 at 10.30 a.m.

Chairperson: Any secondment?

The Deputy Chief Commissioner seconds the motion.

Chairperson: Question: that this Assembly be adjourned to Tuesday 5 September, 2006 at 10.30 a.m.

Chairperson: Those in favour, say ayes, those against, say no.

Members: Ayes.

Chairperson: The ayes have it.

Chairperson: There won't be any statement at adjournment time. The House stands adjourned.

On its rising at 11.30 hours the House stands adjourned to Tuesday 5 September, 2006 at 10.30 a.m.