

No. 2 of 2006

RODRIGUES

SECOND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Debate No. 2 of 2006

Sitting of Friday 22 December, 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 22 DECEMBER, 2006

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ADJOURNMENT

The Executive Council
(Formed by Mr. Johnson Roussety)

Mr. Johnson Roussety	Chief Commissioner, Commissioner responsible for Finance, Economic Affairs, Central Administration, Civil Aviation (administration), Civil status, Customs and Excise (administration), Fisheries, Industrial Development, Information Technology and Telecommunications, Judicial (administration), Legal Services, Marine Services (administration), Meteorology (administration), Postal Services (administration), Registration, State Lands, Statistics in respects of Rodrigues, Town and Country Planning, Tourism, Trade, Commerce and Licensing
Mr. Gaetan Jabeemissar	Deputy Chief Commissioner, Commissioner responsible for Arts and Culture, Consumer Protection, Education (administration), Library Services, Museums, Archives, Historical Sites and buildings, Vocational Training
Mrs. Marie Thérèse CLAIR	Commissioner responsible for Social Security, Child Development, Family Welfare, Social Security (administration), Women's Affairs, Poverty Alleviation
Mr. Francean Aubret Grandcourt	Commissioner responsible for Environment, Housing, Infrastructure including Highways and Roads and Public Buildings and Utilities, Marine Parks, Transport
Mr. Jean Christian Agathe	Commissioner responsible for Labour and Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports, Employment
Mr. Joseph Allan Ladd Emilien	Commissioner responsible for Community Development, Co-operatives, Fire Services, Health (administration), Prisons and Reform Institutions (administration)
Mr. Louis Ange Perrine	Commissioner responsible for Agriculture, Food Production, Forestry, Handicraft, Plant and animal quarantine, Water Resources

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

Mr. Chairperson - Lamvohee, Mr. Joseph Chenlye

Clerk - Toulouse, Mr. Louis Richard

Serjeant -at-Arms - Louis, Mr. Jorgenson

The Clerk: Proclamation No. 23 of 2006.

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

SIR ANEROOD JUGNAUTH
*President of the Republic of
Mauritius*

The Right Honourable
SIR ANEROOD JUGNAUTH
Grand

- By the Honourable SIR
ANEROOD JUGNAUTH,

*Commander of the Order of
the Star and Key of the
Indian Ocean, Knight
Commander of the Order of
Saint Michael and Saint
George, Queen's Counsel,
President of the Republic of
Mauritius.*

&c.. &c.. &c..

WHEREAS by section 71A of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly 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 22 December, 2006 as from 10.30 hours.

Given at State House, Le Réduit, this 18th day of December two thousand and six.

The Chief Commissioner (Mr. J. Roussety): Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished Members of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly; I am pleased to welcome one and all to the first session of the Second Regional Assembly. In particular, I wish to tender a special welcome to the newly elected Members of Regional Assembly and to congratulate the Chairperson and his Deputy, my Deputy, the Commissioners and the Minority Leader following their assumption of office.

The people of Rodrigues have decided to confirm the change in governance which has been initiated by the swearing in of my first Executive Council on 4th August last. The new Executive Council, which is guided by the same philosophy, will initiate a process of change at various levels of our society, which I will broadly set out in this address.

The people of Rodrigues have mandated us to preside over the public affairs of Rodrigues over the next five years. My Government has a clear mandate to bring economic independence in Rodrigues. This is why we have at heart the tasks which have been assigned to us by a majority of the electorate.

My Regional Government aims at gearing our country towards economic independence by carefully striking the right balance between economic development and the preservation of the Rodriguan's identity. The main challenge awaiting us at the horizon is that of building a solid economic base to sustain the future needs of the island and to widen the opportunities and scopes for future generations. No doubt, much efforts and consensus will be required to implement the proper strategies and to set up the proper atmosphere for the complete emancipation of all Rodriguans. It is also important in that prospect to give equality of opportunity to one and all.

Mr Chairperson Sir, my Executive Council intends to, once and for all, put Rodrigues on the right path and to set down the proper mindset to bolster private enterprise and unleash the creativity of the youth of Rodrigues. For too long, the people of Rodrigues have had the impression of being restrained and left apart in the development process. For too long, too many ideas have died, simply because such ideas were reaching deaf ears. Today, the new Executive Council will do everything possible to facilitate the life of people at all levels of society.

Rodrigues remains a very poor segment of the Republic. We have the biggest pockets of poverty in the whole nation and the trend has been upward during the past five years. Mr. Chairperson, Sir, the fight against poverty is useless if a strong and dynamic economy with an efficient private sector is not created. This is why we believe that political autonomy should be followed by a certain degree of economic autonomy. In fact our ultimate goal is to attain economic independence. Since the 1970's the economic base of the country has changed and traditional output in Agriculture and Fishing have, year in and year out, declined drastically. Today Rodrigues exports are very low whereas almost everything is imported, including those products which are capable of being produced here.

The objective of the strategy of economic independence is to improve the quality of life and the standard of living of the people. Government will lay much emphasis on improving and fostering job creation by all means. This is why new policies will be designed to encourage foreign investment and set up the proper reforms and institutional set up to meet the objectives of economic independence. At the same time, the Regional Government will put on top of its priority the preservation of the uniqueness and identity of the Rodriguan lifestyle as well as our natural environment. People in Rodrigues are to preserve their culture and traditions while at the same time evolving towards more economic creativity and productivity. The regional government will leave no stone unturned to strike the right balance between the need for economic progress and the necessity of preserving our authenticity.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, my regional government's economic strategy is, as you are aware, a new approach characterized by a new dynamism and a client oriented approach. Over the last four months, during our first term of office, we have reorganized much aspects of the public administration of Rodrigues, some times very petty matters, but with far reaching impact on the life of people who come to government for any matter. Government should not be omnipotent and be like a big fat watchdog observing one and every act of the people. Even though government should not be passive, we believe in the liberal approaches in managing the public affairs of any country. As far as it is within the precincts of the law and morality, I am of the view that people best know what is good for themselves. This is why the Regional Government will not dictate everything to people. We want all Rodriguans to be his own master of his own destiny.

In only four months in office during our first mandate, I am proud that we have been able to revitalize many sectors and engage in institutional developments that were much needed. In particular we should note the efforts which have been made to issue leases to persons, businesses and in the agricultural sector, the launching of the *Office du Tourisme* and the Business and Investment Promotion Unit as a one stop shop for all those wishing to do business in Rodrigues.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, we promised to the people of Rodrigues to serve their best interests as a caring regional government. We are proud to report to this Assembly that the decision to grant a supplementary end of year allowance of Rs 1000 to all registered fishers has been fulfilled. The book loan scheme for the free provision of books has been finalized and all secondary college students will receive their books via their respective colleges in January. My Executive Council is also waiting for very positive developments in the field of the price of rice and flour. From indications we have had, the Central Government will accept to put the prices of rice and flour in Rodrigues in parity with the prices offered in mainland Mauritius. We will also fulfill the commitment to subsidize the HSC and SC examination fees. We believe in education, but equally important the Executive Council thinks that pecuniary factors should not impeach one and every children in their quest for excellence. All our other commitments towards the people will be fulfilled.

Our economic development strategy will lay emphasis on the development of three initial main engines of growth namely, tourism, fishing and agriculture. At the same time important reforms at various levels will have to be made to modernize much aspects of our daily life. The Executive Council will lay emphasis on efficiency and service to the people. Amongst some important sectors where reforms will be made are the procedures for land lease allocation by the Cadastral Office, availability of reliable economic data, the water sector, the role of the public service and refuse collection. Emphasis will also be laid on the consolidation and improvement of the neediest persons of our society. As announced we will build 1000 low-cost housing units over the next five years. The social security system will have to bear a human face over and above its guiding laws and regulations. The Executive Council will fight exclusion at all costs.

TOURISM

Our strategy in tourism, Mr. Chairperson, Sir...

Tourism is called to be the principal engine of growth of our economy over the next five years. We are much concerned that the tourism industry has not been well oriented during the past years. We are determined to make of this sector a dynamic sector of our economy with the participation of all stakeholders.

In line with the World Tourism Organization's and Central Government's commitment to fight poverty through sustainable tourism development, the regional government will target more local involvement in the development of the sector.

For many years to come, Tourism will remain one of the important pillars of Rodrigues' economy. The sector is instrumental in the creation of direct and indirect employment and supports a wide range of small industries and enterprises. However, since 2004 we have witnessed a decline in tourist arrivals. However, the accession of the Mouvement Rodriguais (MR) government has given tourism a fresh lease of life, the hotel industry is now breathing afresh as a result of robust measures taken since August last. For one the "Office du Tourisme" has become a reality. The installation of a Website for the "Office du Tourisme" is making an important contribution to the various promotional campaigns undertaken recently namely the Salon Top Reza in France, the ADPE/ Nordev Fair and the Florileges Fair in Reunion Island, La Semaine du Tourisme des Iles de L'Ocean Indien (SETIL), the election of Miss Mauritius 2006 and the Rodriguan Road-Shows in Mauritius.

Our objective is to recapture our main tourist markets, namely the regional market including Mauritius and Reunion Island, and attain a figure of 100,000 tourist arrivals. My Executive Council will come forward with a master plan outlining the long term policy for sustained tourism development with emphasis on the conservation of our fragile eco-systems and the island's authenticity. We shall therefore set ourselves on attracting foreign investment in this sector, aggressive marketing to achieve optimum growth, and design the regulatory framework to further those objectives.

Various dormant projects will be revived and serious consideration will be given to the expression of interest by several new investors. Applications for leases will be processed without undue delay. The “Office Du Tourisme” will be present at major international tourism fairs and will organize road-shows in the region. The yearly budget for promotion will reach Rs 10 million shortly.

Our aim will be to complement the national efforts by exhibiting a distinct flavour. My Executive Council will enhance the attractiveness of the island as a tourist destination. The “Iles du Sud” will undergo transformational changes under the aegis of the newly-formed company; the Discovery Rodrigues Co. Ltd. This company, which is fully owned by the RRA, will operate on a commercial basis, the different tourist sites which will be vested in it. In addition, the “Villages Touristiques”, shopping and commercial galleries, nature trails, upgraded historical sites and the availability of leisure facilities through cinema, house waterfronts, etc will offer more attractions.

Caverne Patates and Iles Aux Cocos will be provided with necessary amenities for the comfort and pleasure of visitors. A Tourist Information Office at the airport will provide comprehensive information to visitors to make their stay a memorable and worthwhile one. The Office du Tourism at the Residency will be reinforced to enable it to better respond to the needs of its increasing number of visitors and queries. A kiosk which will be then operated by a private operator will be set up at the Office du Tourism to offer maps, small souvenirs and refreshments to visitors.

The Baladirou holiday complex, which we have inherited in a state of decrepitude, will be renovated and extended and will become a centre for leisure and holidays at the disposal of school children, the elderly, civil servants and other social groups. Its management will be entrusted to Discovery Rodrigues Co. Ltd. At the same time, an appropriate road system will be devised to link Baladirou beach with Grand Baie to improve access to this beautiful site.

We shall endeavour to place Rodrigues on the world map, by making it a dream destination for lovers of nature, game fishing and diving. We shall explore the possibility of introducing new leisure activities at sea such as canoeing, para-sailing, motor-boating and jet skiing.

My Executive Council will seek collaborative ventures with all the islands of the Indian Ocean and will ensure that Rodrigues features in travel packages for a fair share of the market. In collaboration with the successful hotel enterprises in Mauritius, the MTPA and stakeholders in Rodrigues, an ambitious programme of training in related sectors will be launched with a view to giving Rodrigues a competitive edge in this important sector.

My Executive Council will lay much emphasis on the development of small typical family tourist enterprises – *gîtes et maisons d’hôte* - with a view to bring tourists to the home of the Rodriguans. New regulations will be introduced in this house to cater for the appropriate operation of tourist businesses. A complete classification and grading of the different types of tourist businesses will also be included in these regulations.

Greater synergy and interaction with the different tourism stakeholders and associations will be encouraged. There is no room for disputes and we cannot afford to work in the same way as before as we will get the same results. The Executive Council will give its full support to all actions that aims at improving and promoting the tourism industry. Our people will, by all means, be taught and encouraged to keep the same approach towards tourists. We have been told that the way we view tourists is unique and it is one of our greatest assets in that sector. Tourist sites and information structures will be upgraded. Footpaths will be fully revisited and all necessary information panels for walkers will be introduced for example in the Trou d'Argent region.

FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members; the Fisheries Sector is at the crossroad. With the depletion of our fish stock and the degradation of our marine environment and very delicate eco-systems, we need to take vigorous measures to develop the fishing sector. My Executive Council intends to professionalise the fishing activity in order to increase the fish and octopus catches. Of late we experienced hard times when the Central Government decided to review the fishermen allowance scheme. While providing to affected fishermen some sort of social security, we shall endeavour, as I said earlier, to create job opportunities in the fisheries sector by sound management of marine resources and redeployment of redundant labour to other developing areas of economic activity. By and large, every effort will be made to increase production and export earnings and create employment opportunities.

A reconversion scheme will be introduced for those fishers who wish to leave their sea-going occupations and develop another land-based activity. A lump sum will be paid to those fishers who wish to tender back their fisherman cards and use the lump sum as a start up capital for a small business. This will have the double effect of removing pressure on the lagoon and providing other sustainable alternatives to the fishermen families. The same approach will prevail for the much destructive net fishing practices. We will gradually ask for the complete banning of net fishing in the lagoon or shorten the fishing season to allow fish stocks to be reconstituted. We do hope to have the necessary financial support from Central Government and donor organisations to implement these crucial schemes.

No effort, Mr. Chairperson, Sir, will be spared to fight illegal fishing practices and the Fisheries Protection Services will be reinforced to ensure enforcement of existing laws. Our policy shall be zero-tolerance in that field.

Our lagoon is one of our greatest treasures. We have two options, Mr. Chairperson, Sir. First, take appropriate courageous and corrective measures to make the lagoon breath again by removing pressure and allow the fragile ecosystem to regenerate. Second, we can opt to do nothing and allow the current rate of destruction to follow and

pass a dead lagoon to future generations. Obviously, as a caring Regional Government we will opt for the first option.

My Executive Council will aim at encouraging and promoting strategic investments in the fisheries sector in order to

- (i) to enhance the sustainable exploitation of the off-shore fisheries;
- (ii) set up the appropriate logistics for such fisheries;
- (iii) develop domestic and regional fish trade;
- (iv) explore opportunities for the development of aquaculture;
- (v) restore the resource potential of the lagoon eco-system through a sustainable exploitation of existing fish stocks; and
- (vi) fight soil erosion to prevent degradation of our once pristine lagoon.

In the wake of the strategic workshop for stakeholders in the fisheries sector held in November this year, we have now drafted an action plan. The overriding objective is to drive and sustain a high value added seafood industry with our eyes on the local, regional and global markets. In the immediate term, my Executive Council will place much stress on capacity building in the off-shore fishing sector. This will pave the way for the future and release pressure on our lagoon. Appropriate schemes will be set up to use the skills and knowledge of the trainees on the job.

As regards the sea cucumbers – *bambara* – collection, we are aware that due to overexploitation, the resource is being threatened. New regulations will be brought to this house soon to provide for a proper regulatory framework to ensure sustainability in that sector.

In line with our vision for the fisheries sector, port development is one of our main concerns. The port will play a pivotal role in the development of the island's economy. We plan some major developments in Port Mathurin in order to give a boost to the fisheries sector and high value added seafood industry. It is our firm intention to upgrade and modernize our port. We should be able to attract bigger vessels from various parts of the world and develop Port Mathurin as a complementary port to Port Louis. This will cut down on the cost of freight and insurance on imports and exports and act as a catalyst to our productive sectors. We also intend to set up a modern fishing port at Pointe Monier.

The Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan will be actualized so that we emphasize marine conservation, restore lagoon eco-systems and ensure sustainable fisheries development. We shall set up additional marine reserves and develop measures to judiciously manage the exploitation of octopus, sea cucumber and other related

species. We also intend to develop aquaculture in our lagoon which contains several biological resources of high nutritional and commercial values. My Executive Council will solicit expert national and external assistance in the formulation of a master plan for aquaculture development. The services of the Albion Fisheries Research Centre will also be put to contribution. Meanwhile, a pilot project in seaweed farming will be launched and gradually extended. This, again, is a very promising area of activity. By and large the prospects to develop a seafood hub are bright. But my Executive Council will initially develop the legal and institutional framework for orderly development in these sectors.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, although agriculture is the lifeblood of Rodrigues, inadequate attention and support has led to its decline since the 1970's. Rodriguans seem to have lost their love for the soil. Indeed the acreage under crop cultivation has seen a dramatic decline from 1,292 hectares in 1990 to 328 hectares only in 2005.

The exports of major commodities have experienced the same downward trend whether it be in terms of pigs, small chillies or onions. The overall picture is of young people who have fled the soil and an ageing population sticking to traditional and ineffective methods of cultivation.

My Executive Council intends to reverse this sad situation. Agriculture will be re-dynamised as a main pillar of the island's economy. The former Executive has left it in a deplorable state. We shall put things right. We shall reinstate our "ti-piment", our lemons and citrus fruits, "haricots rouges, ourites sec, poisson salé", our cattle, pigs, goats, sheep and chicken that used to fill the holds of the old MV Mauritius. Rodriguans will be motivated to effect an agricultural revolution. Various studies have been commissioned by international agencies from our reputable research institutions in Mauritius. They have landed into drawers. We shall go through all these reports and come up with the required measures to revive the sector.

Let me announce some bold and innovative measures.

- (1) We shall construct a new Agricultural House which will convey our strong commitment to agriculture. Agricultural stations as well as sub-offices have been poorly managed. We shall breathe into them a new energy to reflect our determination to enthuse our planters to intensive and high standard production. This will also project a better image of our island to tourists and other visitors. These stations will exhibit the latest techniques meant to allow planters to adopt the best cultural practices. Regional agricultural offices will offer seeds, seedlings as well as other inputs for sale to the public.

- (2) We shall render the Rodrigues Trade and Marketing Agency operational. This agency will be responsible for the marketing of Rodriguan's products and produce. The cold room which has remained idle since the 1980's at the Commission for Agriculture will be put to use for the storage of lemon, onion, potato and the likes.
- (3) With a view to revitalizing the sector, my Regional Government will set up model lemon/citrus fruits and banana orchards in the island, for emulation by producers.
- (4) To boost up the production of local red bean, a pilot improvement programme will be started.
- (5) We shall set up a breeding programme for the improvement of local "*ti piment*" while preserving its genetic characteristics. Five models will be used to arrive at the ideal type, which will be then be disseminated across the island.
- (6) A serious rehabilitation exercise will be started to revive our "onion toupie" and garlic which, over the years, has sustained a process of degeneration.

We also intend to intensify the production of potato, garlic, palm heart, the latter with the collaboration of the Mauritius Research Council (MRC), the AREU and the MSIRI. The fruit and flower sector will be accorded increased attention in view of their potential for export and their attractiveness to visitors. Fruits that come up well in Rodrigues such as bananas, papayas, guavas, pine-apples, pamplemousses, sugar apple and other citrus fruits, will be widely spread across the territory in line with the micro climate which best suits them.

Animal husbandry can be a money-spinner if well managed and given political support. The new MR Executive Council will set itself the task of renovating the poultry, goat, beef and cattle farms in suitable areas. A number of measures will be taken to support the livestock sector, namely, the construction of an abattoir, availability at the Agricultural Services of livestock feed, transfer of the dairy farm at St. Gabriel to the newly created Dairy Cow Owners Association, encouragement of piglet production, boosting up of poultry production and reduction of import of such commodities, regular capacity building initiatives for planters and farmers in Rodrigues. Finally, serious consideration will be given to the delimitation of pastures in selected areas to control damage to vegetables and other plantations caused by stray animals.

We will set up a hydroponics village to demonstrate the possibilities in that field and encourage its development amongst the planters community.

Agro-industry which holds prospects of intensive job creation, until now ignored, will now be considered a top priority. We have already solicited the assistance of the University of Mauritius for the construction of a food Analysis Laboratory at Citronelle to be completed during our five-year mandate. This Laboratory will be responsible for setting the high standards for agro-industrial products, and honey in particular, to forge a Rodriguan label and, hence, provide the competitive edge for marketing of Rodriguan produce.

Furthermore, as a caring government, we appreciate the importance of a regular supply of water for agricultural development. We shall acquire 100 drip irrigation systems for planters' associations. Besides, every assistance will be afforded to planters for construction of farm reservoirs. Funding will be sought from IFAD for the construction of two additional water harvesting structures in agricultural valleys. The Irrigation Unit of the Commission for Agriculture will work on irrigation projects at Champs, Montagne Goyave, Chateau Des Fleurs, Vainqueurs and other agricultural regions.

Last but not least, my Executive Council will proceed with the:-

- (i) construction of a modern market at Port Mathurin for storage and sale of fruits and vegetables;
- (ii) setting up of a Forum on agro-business with the collaboration of AREU. Prospects in agro-business will be exposed to young entrepreneurs who will be given necessary support to manage their nascent businesses;
- (ii) setting up of a Pasture Management Unit for quality fodder production, silage and hay making;
- (iv) provision of access to machinery for land preparation through the setting up of an integrated mechanical pool;
- (v) agricultural leases will be granted through a fast track to those with a well planned agricultural project; and
- (vi) construction of a new Veterinary Complex at Citronelle. This will include a mini micro-biological lab to improve customer service. A dog pound will see the light at Grenade to deal with the problem of stray dogs. This will be reinforced by a sterilisation campaign.

BREAKING THE WATER BOTTELENECK

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, we have to break the water bottleneck in Rodrigues.

The Water production sector, whether for domestic, industrial and agricultural purposes, which has remained neglected for decades, apart from the infamous Anse Raffin Dam, will be invigorated. With the accession of the MR to power, places like Ste Marie and Baie du Nord, who have never received tap water before, were connected with the water distribution for the first time. My Executive Council has already set the tone at Baie du Nord, Fond La Bonté and other regions. We shall maintain the momentum to meet an estimated demand of 10,000 to 15000m³ of water daily over the long term.

My regional government will set about its tasks as follows:

- (a) maximum exploitation and management of surface and underground water resources;
- (b) desalination of brackish water from existing boreholes at Baie Topaze, Camp Du Roi and Fond La Digue;
- (c) de-silting of existing dams;
- (d) redesign of surface water distribution networks in trenches;
- (e) construction of an additional dam;
- (f) encouraging rain water harvesting and putting incentives for that; and
- (g) desalination of sea water.

To achieve our objectives in the water management sector, massive investments will be required. The Water Resources Division needs to be revamped for greater efficiency. While initial investments of Rs 40 million would be required in the sector, the annual return on investment of Rs 600,000, representing annual water rent, is ludicrous. It stands to reason that Funding agencies will need to be satisfied on our repayment and debt servicing capacity. This leads me to the realisation, that should be driven home to our population, that water will need to be metered and paid for at an affordable price for all water users in the future as soon as regular distribution becomes a reality.

The problem of water supply is indeed one of the biggest challenges for this mandate and the question is how to find solutions to our long lasting and acute water problem. No doubt, the water problem has several roots and very often it is the natural factors such as drought and lack of catchments and retention areas which are mostly outlined to explain the great scarcity of water. Very rarely is the institutional set up of water itself examined. We believe that the whole system of water collection, treatment

and distribution should be reviewed and that it is high time for Rodrigues to have its semi-autonomous body to manage its water sector. This is why a separate corporate body working under the aegis of the Commission for Water Resources will be set up to manage the water sector in Rodrigues. In this context, an expert from the UNDP is expected to report on the proper institutional set up to be put in place. He is expected here in early January. Management of water is today a much professionalised affair and at the level of the Commission, it is no longer possible to manage the situation on an in-house principle. We are setting the path for the modernisation of public utilities in the island.

LAND – ENGAGING THE REVOLUTION

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, land, we are engaging the revolution we promised to the people. In view of the exiguity of our island, land is in high demand for various purposes all competing among themselves and not always mutual exclusive. Of the 10,800 hectares of State land in Rodrigues, about 1,000 hectares is freehold. The balance has got to be judiciously utilized in the best interests of the population. We, however, believe that in the immediate term, a rapid allocation of leases for productive purposes will help to facilitate economic development. During the last four months, we have granted hundreds of leases – authentic leases, not false – to applicants who applied since time immemorial. But we need to set up proper legal safeguards against abuse and over exploitation. Hence, the need to come up with a planning legislation consistent with the current Business Facilitation Act.

The Cadastral Unit will now be completely reshuffled and strengthened with different clusters for the different services provided there, new morcellements will be identified and the on-going Housing and Cadastral Survey will result in a fully digitalised land information system.

Rodriguans will recall the historical proposal we made on 15th May 2006 regarding the conversion of leasehold land into freehold private property. This proposal is part and parcel of our electoral manifesto which has been approved by a clear cut majority on 10th December last. We are committed to that goal as we need to empower people, put power in their hands and trust them as it is the practice in democratic countries. As we made clear in our Electoral Manifesto, we are committed to a programme of converting tenants for life into owners with proprietary rights, both on their house and the residential land on which they stand. The Select Committee, which was set up during our short former mandate, will be reactivated very soon to work out the modalities of this intention to *“faire rodriguais vine propriétaire dans so pays”*.

At the same time we want to unleash the thriving business potential that many local promoters have and are ready to achieve. A new form of commercial lease, that I will call of an IRS sort, will be now made available to potential promoters on selected sites to develop high class houses and apartments with a view to renting them long term

or selling them to prospective buyers. It is expected that such a strategy will boost up economic development and create thousands of jobs in the construction industry and afterwards to maintain these resorts and annexed facilities. Such projects will be implemented on arid land and will not be given beach frontage. They will have to cater for their own water needs with means such as desalination.

Finally, the long overdue “Plan d’Amenagement du Territoire” will be drafted and implemented to ensure proper planning and sustainable long term use of our land resources.

EDUCATION

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, our future rests on the type of education that we provide to our children and young persons. Our objective of achieving economic independence, requires of the educational system and teachers, that they produce men and women who value work, creativity, innovation and change. Our people need a different mindset to face the new international scenarios. We are, therefore, determined to improve our educational efforts at all levels and streams. Academic education should be supplemented with a strong dose of realism and pragmatism. I shall briefly expose our intentions in concrete terms.

We shall devise ways and means to continually raise the success rate at the CPE. In addition, a pedagogical cell will be set up to adapt the curriculum and materials produced in Mauritius to Rodriguan specificity. We want to provide advanced training in teaching techniques and management of educational institutions to teachers and Deputy Head Teachers.

It is proposed to restructure the management of schools on regional directorate lines. Moreover, a Regional Education Committee will be set up for the improvement of primary education and the management of schools.

In order to help parents support the formal educational process, an additional literacy and numeracy project will be implemented. Assistance is being sought from the Decentralised Co-operation Programme. This will target some 1,250 persons, from different walks of life.

With a view to increasing access to secondary and tertiary education, it is proposed to effect a number of changes in the institutional framework. First and foremost, Rodrigues will take full responsibility for the management of REDCO colleges. It is noteworthy that with effect from January 2007, REDCO will be managed by a Resident Manager in Rodrigues. Le Chou and Marechal Colleges will be converted into Forms I to VI Colleges with effect from 2007. Our youths will have increased opportunities to access poly-technical schools and institutions of tertiary learning. We shall strengthen our partnership with these institutions and the Technical School Management Trust Fund.

The Human Resource Centre will be encouraged to play a pivotal role in the training and development sector. During the next five years, it is proposed to add to the current Diploma Courses in management, civil engineering, pre-vocation education and software engineering. A number of short, job related, non-award courses will be introduced with the assistance of SEHDA and others. In addition, a training programme for Civil Servants based on a recent analysis of training needs carried out by the ITEC experts, will be implemented.

We are of the view that vocational education is a prerequisite for economic independence. With the assistance of SEHDA, we shall evolve an empowerment programme which will include job training and attachment to the industry.

The Human Resource Centre will strengthen its links with IVTB. It will also support the Information & Communications Technologies programme that will be implemented across the whole island. My Executive Council has made an assessment of the population of unemployed in Rodrigues and has noticed a serious mismatch between educational achievements of unemployed and job demands. This is a matter of concern and requires vigorous action to provide the right synergy between education and the requirement of the job market.

FINANCE

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, as holder of the finance portfolio, I pledge to ensure sound public sector financial management with emphasis on accountability at all levels and the reduction of waste and wastage. Indeed the Executive Council shall adopt the Minister of Finance's credo namely to tighten expenditure control, cut down unproductive spending and wastage, reduce costs without compromising quality of service, appraise and prioritize projects using scientific methods and pay heed to the guidelines provided by the Audit Office.

I am alive to the disproportionate size of the island's revenue as compared to the total revenue this year. In fact, our revenue represents only some 2% of the total appropriated funds by the National Assembly for Financial Year 2006/2007. My Executive Council will do its utmost to improve this situation by a consistent step by step approach to the achievement of economic independence. To that effect, I have asked my colleague Commissioners to optimize capital resources towards priority areas.

The current budget for Financial Year 2006-2007, which was put in place by the previous government, will be restructured so that it accords with our philosophy and our sense of priority.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, as part of my responsibilities as Commissioner for Finance, I am required to submit my annual estimates for Financial Year 2007-2008 not later than 31 March 2007 to the Central Government. With this in view, we will have several

consultations with all stakeholders to obtain a consensus on how our programme can be actualized towards the objective of economic independence. One thing is however certain, the thrust of our first budgetary exercise will be on the improvement of the growth potential of Rodrigues, the stimulation of private investment, the improvement of our infrastructure, the development of tourism, fisheries and other industrial and agricultural sectors with a view to reducing poverty and creating job opportunities.

SIDPR

The formulation of a sustainable integrated plan for Rodrigues has been an arduous task. We shall now concentrate on the formulation of strategies and action plan which will help us assess the validity of the actions we propose to take and bring timely corrections, if warranted.

ECONOMIC INDICATORS

The Executive Council will set up the proper statistical framework to equip Rodrigues with a sound statistical department with a view to providing vital statistics such as Gross Domestic Products of Rodrigues, the external accounts, tourist arrivals and other basic economic fundamentals. It is proposed to reinforce and restructure the current Statistical Unit and subsume it under a new Economic Planning and Monitoring Unit.

PUBLIC SERVICE & ADMINISTRATION

In actual fact, our Public Service needs a complete overhaul. Procedures and rules that have become obsolete and that contribute to red-tape should be done away with. In fact, we shall encourage a process of deregulation in our day to day communication with our customers be they within the RRA administration or outside. Officers should be empowered at all levels to make a meaningful contribution to policy formulation, decision making and project implementation. The Public Service in Rodrigues should become more customer-friendly. In fact, they should be the driving force for the emerging private sector. The key words for every public officer should be: “public service mindedness”, “customization” and “shorter handling time”. Hence, the need for a comprehensive “public service improvement programme” with its components of training and development, organization development, performance appraisal, empowerment and sound reward systems. With the modernization of work practices and physical environment, public officers must also display the highest standards of morality and integrity. Corruption, intimidation and harassment should disappear from Public Sector vocabulary. Public Officers should be sensitized on the need for transparency, accountability and cost-effectiveness. The Public Procurement Act which will shortly be operational will provide a healthy framework for modern values.

ICT – INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, while the ICT Sector in Rodrigues has witnessed humble beginnings, it is our wish to spread informatics wide and large. Educational institutions will be properly equipped and it is proposed to train some 10,000 people over the next 4 years under the Universal ICT Education Programme. After successful completion of the programme, trainees will obtain an internationally recognised certificate. The regional government will set the tone by moving towards e-government. Our website will be re-formatted and re-engineered to provide comprehensive information for members of the public and for intra and inter departmental communication, and for better management of Information Systems. E-Government services will help interested persons to download forms for various purposes. Such forms could be filled in their own homes.

A proper strategy will be devised to foster the development of call centres in Rodrigues with a view to benefit from the job prospects arising from such businesses.

FORESTS AND NATURAL RESOURCES REHABILITATION

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, another area which will absorb much of our energy and time is the forest sector, which has witnessed massive deforestation. We cannot wait. We need to start an aggressive afforestation campaign to restore our forests. Here, we shall seek the collaboration of every Rodriguans so that by the year 2011, yes 2011, we would have reinstated 2,000 hectares of forest. In the first instance, we plan to focus on Montagne Cabris, Montagne Croupier, Anse Quitor, Ile aux Cocos, Citron Donis and Eau Vannée. We also intend to organise a “Semaine de l’Arbre” each year to sensitize the population on the importance of afforestation and environment. During this event, a selected area will be afforested with the participation of stakeholders.

Our main preoccupation will be the eradication of “piquant loulou” notably in the Northern region. Our initial targets will be Accacia, Camp Du Roi, Caverne Provert, Creve Coeur, Terre Rouge, Montagne Fanal and Grand Baie. We shall implement the “Forêt Villageois” where forest trees, preferably native species, will be planted by villagers under the guidance of the Forest Department.

“Les Iles du Sud” will be developed as a new tourist attraction. These islets which are visited by tourists, conveyed in our pleasure crafts, need to be preserved for sustained use and development. They will be declared forest reserves and access thereto will be strictly controlled. I am pleased to announce yet another initiative – the land management rehabilitation programme with assistance from UNDP. Special attention will be given to the rehabilitation of our land and forest areas.

INFRASTRUCTURE & ROAD NETWORK

In view of the uneven topography of the island, it is proposed to put up a Road Infrastructural Programme with a view to

- (i) upgrading and extending existing roads;
- (ii) constructing new ones to facilitate inland communication; and
- (iii) adjust to the increasing vehicular traffic.

My Executive Council has already prepared an initial phase of road construction which will link villages lying far apart. A new road linking Port Mathurin to Riviere Cocos via Citron Donis will be built. Alongside this exercise, track roads will also be constructed in a number of villages.

With the increase in the number of vehicles and vehicular traffic, the National Transport Authority will be called upon to ensure strict observation of road traffic legislations. My Executive Council will monitor the importation of all vehicles. With the influx of tourists on the island, we propose to consider allocating additional taxi permits as well as encouraging the late operation of public transport. Parking has become a problem in Port Mathurin. My Executive Council will adopt creative measures, for example providing that new buildings should have their own in-built parking lots. This will relieve traffic congestion, which, otherwise, would become exacerbated in the next ten years.

ENVIRONMENT AND REFUSE COLLECTION

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, the Regional Government will make of the preservation and protection of the environment a sacred matter. Tourists often complain of the fact that there are plastic bottles and other waste along roads and beaches. We will develop and implement proper strategies for the cleaning and embellishment of all sites. At the same time, much emphasis will be laid on sensitisation of all spheres of society on the necessity to respect and to protect the environment. The refuse collection system will be reorganised.

Every three years, the Regional Assembly must organise the bidding process for selecting an appropriate contractor for refuse collection in Rodrigues. This process is very costly and very time consuming and involves social stress for the workers when a new contractor is awarded the contract. It is also felt that this system is too costly and that there is not enough control and efficiency on the work which is being done. The same approach will prevail as in the water sector as far as the organisational set up is concerned. The Regional Assembly will organise its own refuse collection facility again in an autonomous agency that will work under the aegis of the Commission for Public Infrastructure and Environment. In this way we think that fewer problems will occur and

the Commission will have a direction over what is being done and how it is being done. Economies of scale will result as the initial investment in equipment will be justified over the long term. This will also provide for stability, experience building and greater professionalism.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

My Executive Council will accelerate the issue of building and development permits for the construction of decent houses and other buildings. We will provide the necessary budget to help the needy cast their slabs. As mentioned earlier 1000 low-cost self-help housing units will be realised over our five-year mandate. An agency for housing development for the neediest will be created in Rodrigues.

CIVIL AVIATION

Civil Aviation is in modern societies a sine qua non of economic development, not only for passenger conveyance, but for the transport of cargo within the shortest time possible. My Executive Council will ensure that Airport of Rodrigues becomes a full-fledged licensee, and complies with all the requirements of the International Civil Aviation Organisation. It is our earnest wish that the direct flight Reunion/Rodrigues be re-established and efforts be focalised on opening of the air access including direct connections with other Indian Ocean Islands.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT & SME'S

The centre piece of our strategy in this sector will be the strengthening of the Business & Investment Promotion Unit (BIPU). BIPU will act as a fast track one-stop shop for all industrial development matters, issuing permits, licenses and clearances without inordinate delay and in conformity with the new Business Facilitation Act. Efforts will be deployed to set up in Rodrigues a branch of the Registrar of Companies. Moreover, BIPU will be called upon to act as a sub-office of the Empowerment Fund so that the latter becomes easily accessible to local entrepreneurs. Rodriguan entrepreneurs will be encouraged to participate in international fairs for the promotion of the Rodriguan products. In Rodrigues itself, it is proposed to replicate the “Caravane de L’Entrepreneuriat” with the collaboration of the SEHDA. In order to ensure sufficient levels of private investments, my Executive Council will set up a Rodrigues State Investment Company. Fisheries will be first beneficiary of such investments.

The Regional Government will introduce a loan scheme in its first budget to provide for soft loan facilities to small entrepreneurs and needy families for the development of income generating projects. The objective of this project is to provide for financial assistance to all those poor persons who have a small project but for some

reason don't qualify for loan from banks. Special emphasis will be laid on women and women-headed families.

HANDICRAFT

At long last, the Handicraft Sector will be revitalised. We shall ensure that a Memorandum of Understanding is signed without any further delay with SEHDA, which can share its expertise with our artisans, craftsmen and craftswomen. A joint RRA and SEHDA Committee will formulate and implement a clear strategy for the development of the handicraft sector in Rodrigues.

It must be borne in mind that the Handicraft sector is labour intensive. More than 1,500 persons are registered with SEHDA while 300 others are engaged in SME's. New sectors will, nevertheless, need to be explored, for example, ceramic, pottery, papier maché craft, wood work, packaging, label, fashion design in textile garments, decoration and textile products.

My Executive Committee will favour overseas training and transfer of the best technologies. We reckon that with proper management and support, this sector will provide numerous jobs and absorb the young unemployed housewives, and those from low socio-economic background in some sort of cottage economy. The sector will be geared to become more export oriented. Tourists will be able to view the products in two "Villages Artisanats", one at Port Mathurin, the other in Corail region where accessibility to visitors is the highest. In that respect, the Rodrigues Trade and Marketing Agency will work in close collaboration with SEHDA.

COOPERATIVES

Rodriguan Solidarity has become proverbial. Increased efforts will be made to ensure that Co-operatives set up for various economic activities, are made to run on business lines with adequate dividends for shareholders and excellent service to customers. My Executive Council will come up with innovative measures which will make the Co-operative movement become the linchpin of all village economic activities.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, in so far as Social Security and Welfare is concerned, it is the policy of my Executive Council to try and enhance the quality of life in Rodrigues. At present some 2,100 heads of households are caught in the poverty trap and are being assisted to the tune of Rs 2.7 million per month. In addition, some 1,300 persons are benefiting from social aid as of right in view of their status as widow, orphans and invalids. But every effort will be deployed by my Executive Council to ensure that these people do not rely entirely on the meagre assistance provided by

Government. We shall endeavour to provide employment opportunities to those that are willing and are able to work.

With a view to providing better services to our elderly and disabled persons, we intend to reactivate the Network Support Service. This service will be at the beck and call of our citizens for timely support and advice.

Requests for social aid will be attended to in the shortest possible time to alleviate the sufferings of the vulnerable groups. It is our intention to open a new Social Security Office in the vicinity of Grande Montagne and to provide new accommodation to the one serving Mont Lubin region.

Domiciliary medical visits to the handicapped and the elderly will become more frequent for better follow up and personalised care. To enhance the quality of life of the handicapped, my Executive Council intends to purchase a greater number of wheelchairs in order to allow these otherwise capable members of our society to move about and participate fully in the social and economic life of their community.

An island-wide survey will be carried with the assistance of the Central Statistical Office to gauge the real extent of poverty in Rodrigues with a view to remedial action.

The Mouvement Rodriguais Executive Council will give its entire attention to the upliftment of women while embarking on its projects in all the sectors. The gender dimension will predominate. One overriding objective will be to ensure that the women fishers and “piqueuses d’ourites” are able to continue their activities in more favourable conditions. However, my Executive Council will leave no stone unturned to preserve delicate eco-systems and in the process, identify suitable alternative employment for our woman who may not be able to continue relying on the present activities for a living. Moreover, my Executive Council intends to intensify off-lagoon fishing. Beneficiaries of community boats, within the IFAD/RDP project, will also benefit from the openings in off-lagoon fishing in particular fishing around the FADS. Each team is expected to include 2 women fishers.

The Joint Government/IFAD Marine and Agricultural Resource Support Programme, which is expected to be operational in 2008, will give a new dimension to the activities of lagoon fishers. They will be encouraged to run a small scale aquaculture focused on seaweed farming and the like. It is expected that many women will secure employment in this sector. Another area where employment creation will be realised is under the IFAD/RDP Project which we shall have the opportunity of re-energising for a further two years. The main beneficiaries will be women. Activities will range from micro-finance projects, purchase of equipment and furniture, and provision of agricultural and farm equipment using the latest scientific methods.

The problem of teenage pregnancy will be an important preoccupation of my Executive Council. Thus, a whole gamut of preventive measures will be encouraged. The strategic plan thereon will encompass three inter-related strategies namely prevention,

empowerment and integration. Parents will be better sensitized on their roles as the first sex educators of their children, male and female. Single mothers will be fully integrated into the educational, training and employment domains. They will be supported initially through psychological support, housing assistance, nutritional guidance and exposure to parental guides and child care. Peer therapeutic support will be encouraged.

YOUTH AND SPORTS

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, we believe our future lies with our youth. *“The Child is the Father of the Man”* goes the proverb. My Executive Council will set to itself the following objectives:-

- encourage youth participation in decision making generally, and in sports activities in particular;
- promote “sport de masse” and attract greater participation in sports activities generally, the ultimate aim being to foster physical and mental health;
- promote unity, encourage solidarity and facilitate social integration; and
- integrate the youth in the employment mainstream through the “Ateliers de Savoir”.

My Executive Council will, to this effect, set up six “Centres d’ Aide et d’ Informations” in the six local regions, working closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau so that information on all aspects of economic and social activities may flow smoothly to the people in the various regions. In so far as substance abuse is concerned, my Executive Council will ensure that adequate support is given to the Rodrigues Regional Youth Task Force for the control of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs consumption via educational and other activities.

The Youth Counselling and Health Centres will be made to play a significant role in the promotion of the health and welfare of the young people. The trainees from the “Atelier des Savoirs” will be encouraged to start their own enterprises and to participate in tenders for works launched by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. We also intend to launch a Rodrigues Youth Entrepreneur Scheme and a “Colonie de Vacances”. The sports cadre would be reorganized for greater professionalism and effectiveness.

Moreover, physical and health institutions in both primary and secondary schools will be encouraged to work under the guidance of the Commission for Youth and Sports’ Sports Cadre. By and large my Executive Council intends to promote sports to the highest standards possible through a whole panoply of logistics and technical inputs. Coming events which will dynamize the sports sector and galvanize the youth are:-

- the Jeux Inter-villages and Jeux Inter-regions yearly;
- the Jeux Des Iles, Beach Soccer and Swimming Competition at Marechal Swimming Pool 2007;
- the Jeux de Rodrigues in August 2008 and subsequently every 2 years;
- la Journée Internationale de L’Ocean Indien in 2009; and
- the alignment of Camp Du Roi Football Stadium on International Standards and attracting international football teams preparing for the World Cup 2010 to play friendly matches and for training.

SPORTS INFRASTRUCTURE

In terms of sports infrastructure, my Executive Council will set up a multi-sports training complex at Plaine Maho which will be fully equipped with a view to providing residential and training facilities to sportsmen and women in nearly all disciplines, including horse racing/riding.

In addition, a Sports Medical Centre will be set up for the provision of health assistance and advice to athletes. This centre will be equipped with fully qualified sport medical and paramedical staff.

HEALTH

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, health is strength. A healthy nation contributes to economic development and wealth creation. My Executive Council will ensure the following rights for patients:-

- free health care to all, irrespective of financial means;
- comprehensive information to patients on their health conditions and any risks involved in medical treatment and this, in a simple layman’s language;
- easy access to the Health Directorate for the lodging of complaints, investigation thereof and communication of results to complainants with a possibility of appeal to the Ministry;
- availability of appropriate drugs and medicines;

- proper food and drinks prepared in the best sanitary and hygienic conditions;
- comfortable beds, clean sheets and pillow cases, and a clean and pleasant environment; and
- assurance of security and regular observation of patients.

My Executive Council also proposes to upgrade different departments of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the Community Health Centres.

CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, my Regional Government will lay much emphasis on the development and promotion of our rich and unique cultural heritage.

Conscients de la dimension culturelle du développement et du rôle de la culture dans l'harmonie sociale et du développement économique, nous donnerons à l'art la place qui lui revient. Aussi nous envisageons la valorisation de notre identité culturelle à travers le cursus scolaire et les enseignants seront formés à cet effet. De plus, l'art sous la forme du théâtre, de la peinture, de la sculpture et l'art culinaire seront valorisés au cours des différentes manifestations culturelles, touristiques et artistiques que nous comptons organiser.

Par ailleurs, nous avons l'intention d'encourager les échanges culturels entre Rodrigues et Maurice ainsi qu'avec les autres îles de l'Océan Indien et du monde. Avec l'appui du Ministère des Arts et de la Culture, un Centre de Lecture et d'Animation culturelle verra le jour à La Ferme afin de promouvoir l'accès à la culture et aux activités culturelles.

M. Le Président, Membres distingués de cet auguste assemblé, l'histoire de Rodrigues n'est pas suffisamment connue. Afin de pallier à cette lacune, un musée retraçant l'histoire de Rodrigues et ses facettes sera créé. Par ailleurs nous envisageons de préserver et de valoriser les bâtiments et sites historiques. De plus un bureau des archives sera mis sur pied.

METEOROLOGY AND CLIMATIC CHANGES

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, in view of the exposure of our island to natural calamities - droughts, cyclones, torrential rains and lately, tsunamis, my Executive Council intends to build up on cyclone and other disasters preparedness. This will be done by encouraging the authorities to expedite the installation of the appropriate early warning systems in Rodrigues so that the island is not completely stranded when all

communications with the mainland are interrupted during calamities. Moreover, fishermen and others whom such events affect in a direct way will be sensitized to the extreme need to develop preparedness in every way to reduce the impact of such scourges on economic activity and human life.

PRISON AND REFORMS INSTITUTIONS

In our effort to rehabilitate deviants and delinquents, so that they may reintegrate the mainstream after incarceration, our reform institutions will ensure that skills are developed inside prisons and positive human values are internalized.

FIRE SERVICES

With the sophistication of life in Rodrigues, that is, more houses, shops etc, the security of buildings will assume a greater importance. Hence, the need for an efficient Fire Service. My Executive Council will, therefore, ensure that our Firemen are well trained, use latest equipment and technologies and are available at short notice to deal with emergencies such as fire, flood and other calamities. Further, an additional Fire Station will be constructed in the vicinity of Mont Lubin.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, distinguished members, in this address, I have exposed the plans of the new regional government over the short and medium terms. The plan spans over the whole spectrum of social and economic activities that we intend to set in motion. We are confident that our people have the capacity and the determination to forge ahead. Their work, their dedication to duty and their resolve will produce a society where it will be good to live and bring up our children, where work will provide us with our necessities, and where we shall have enough leisure time to promote arts and culture and learning in all its forms.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson, Sir.

Vive l'indépendance économique.

God bless Rodrigues.

(Applause)

The Chief Commissioner: Mr. Chairperson, Sir, before I move for the adjournment, I would wish, in my capacity as Chief Commissioner, to say a few words.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, this has been a very special year in the history of this Assembly and Rodrigues. They have witnessed the end of the first session of the Regional Assembly and today we have started the first ordinary meeting of the second session.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, you will recall that I was elected Chief Commissioner on the 4th of August, this year and re-elected on the 16th of December, 2006. During the time this Regional Government stayed in office, we have had the opportunity to hold only five sittings since the Assembly was dissolved on the 23rd of October, 2006, pursuant to a Proclamation issued by the President of the Republic. Our programme and schedule of work in this Assembly have been disturbed by the campaigns for the 10th December elections.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, I wish, now, to extend my thanks to you for the manner in which you have presided over the deliberations of this Assembly, both before and after the change of the Regional Government.

I also wish to thank all the respected members, who, at that time, participated in the debates and matters of the House with special attitudes to Miss Lindsay Castel and Mr. Robertson Mercure.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, may I now, be allowed to ask you, in my own personal name and in that of all the members of the House, to present the season's greetings to the President of the Republic and to Lady Jugnauth and also to the vice-President and Mrs. Bundhun and to the Prime Minister of the Republic and Mrs. Ramgoolam and their families. I also wish to present the season's greetings to the leader of the Mouvement Rodriguais party and Mrs. Vonmally and to the President of the Movement Rodriguais party and to their families.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, I convey to you and to Mrs. Lamvohee, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. My best wishes equally go to all members of the Executive Council and their families, to all respected members of the House and their families, the Clerk of the Regional Assembly and to his families, to the Island Chief Executive and his families, to all Departmental Heads and their families and to all staffs of the Regional Assembly and their families.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, Sir.

The Minority Leader (Mr. L. S. CLAIR): M. le Président, je voudrais féliciter l'équipe qui est sortie gagnant des élections régionales du 10 décembre 2006. Je voudrais surtout féliciter et remercier mes collègues de l'OPR pour leur courage et la manière dont ils ont participé aux élections. Nous l'avons fait dans le respect et la dignité du peuple rodriguais, car le prix de la liberté c'est toujours la responsabilité.

Nous ne nous sommes jamais écartés de notre vision de construire ce pays et d'accompagner les Rodriguais dans la construction de leur avenir par la responsabilisation. Je voudrais rendre hommage aux militants et partisans de l'OPR pour leur courage et leur sens de dignité. Nous prenons part à la souffrance de ceux qui ont été agressés et à la souffrance de ce couple dont la maison a été incendiée, souhaitant que ce peuple, tant aimé par nos visiteurs puissent vivre en paix et que notre environnement familial, social, humain et physique ne se dégrade pas pour le bonheur et le bien de tous.

M. le Président, puis-je vous demander, en mon nom personnel et aux noms de mes collègues, de transmettre au Président de la République, Sir Anerood Jugnauth et Lady Jugnauth, au Premier Ministre, l'Honorable Navin Ramgoolam et Mme Ramgoolam, Honorable vice-Premier Ministres et leurs épouses, au Speaker de l'Assemblée Nationale et Mme Purryag et au Leader de l'Opposition, l'Honorable Nando Bodha et Madame, nos vœux de Joyeux Noël et de Bonne Année 2007. M. le Président, puis-je vous souhaiter, et à Mme Lamvohee et famille, un Joyeux Noël et une Bonne Année.

Nos meilleurs vœux vont également aux membres de cette assemblée et à leur famille, à M. Richard Toulouse, nouvellement installé à son poste de Clerk et Madame, à M. Vithilingem qui nous quitte bientôt et Madame. Nous lui disons un grand merci pour le bon travail accompli durant ces quelques années. Nos vœux vont aussi à tout le personnel de l'assemblée et à leur famille, les policiers et à leur famille.

Enfin, tous nos vœux de Joyeux Noël et de Bonne Année à tous les enfants et tous les jeunes de Rodrigues et du monde entier. A ceux et à celles qui vont prendre le chemin de l'école, nous leur souhaitons une bonne rentrée de classe pour 2007. Nos vœux de Joyeux Noël et de Bonne Année à toutes les familles de Rodrigues et du monde entier et ceux travaillant à Rodrigues et à « *nou banne gran dimoune* ». Que la célébration de la naissance de Jésus Christ nous fasse comprendre que la libération de l'homme et de la femme rodriguais, passe par la responsabilité de soi, des autres et de son pays.

Merci, M. le Président.

Mr. Chairperson: Respected Members, I will associate myself with the season's greeting which the House has expressed to the President of the Republic and Lady Jugnauth, the vice-President and Mrs. Bundhun and to the Prime Minister of the Republic and Mrs. Ramgoolam and their families. I will, with great pleasure, convey the message of the House to them.

I thank the Chief Commissioner, on my behalf and on behalf of the Secretariat of the Assembly for his kind words and best wishes to my family and to all members of the Secretariat and their families. I thank the Minority Leader for his kind words and best wishes to my family and to the families of all the members of the Secretariat of this Assembly.

In return, I am pleased to express a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the Chief Commissioner, the Deputy Chief Commissioner and the Commissioners and their spouse, to the Minority Leader and Mrs. Clair and to all members and their families.

Finally, I wish to assure all members that I am very grateful to them for their co-operation and understanding of this House. Once again, best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year. Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chief Commissioner: Mr. Chairperson, Sir, I move that this Assembly be now adjourned to Tuesday 13 February, 2007 at 10.30 a.m.

The Deputy Chief Commissioner rose and seconded.

On question put, the motion was agreed to.

At 11.55 a.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 13 February, 2007, at 10.30 a.m.