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Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade of the Republic of Mauritius

Wednesday, 20 July 2016

Speaker: Honourable Seetannah Lutchmeenaraidoo

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STATEMENT

BY

THE HON. SEETANAH LUTCHMEENARAIDOO

**MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE
OF
THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS**

GENERAL DEBATE
UNCTAD XIV CONFERENCE
20 JULY 2016

Madam Chairperson,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me and my delegation to participate in the UNCTAD XIV Conference. I feel honoured to address the Conference under your Chairmanship.

At the outset, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the Government of Kenya for the excellent organisation of this Conference and to say how touched we are by the warm hospitality of the people of Kenya.

Madam Chairperson,

My delegation would like to associate itself with the statements made by Tanzania on behalf of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of countries (ACP) and Namibia for the African Group

I also wish to underscore the leadership and tireless efforts of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Dr. Kituyi, in making UNCTAD more responsive to the needs of the developing countries. His report to UNCTAD XIV highlighting the need to move from '*From Decisions to Actions*' could not be more timely.

We note that the four action lines for UNCTAD proposed in the report are expected to contribute to the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals. We will support UNCTAD's efforts in this direction.

Madam Chairperson,

We could not agree more with the theme for this Conference focusing on the need to create "*an inclusive and equitable global economic environment for trade and development*".

It is indeed important to accelerate our efforts to implement decisions reached in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Conference on Financing for Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the 10th WTO Ministerial Conference in Nairobi.

To do so will no doubt require a new generation of policies and access to finance, investment and innovative technology. It will also require a conducive economic environment.

However, the current state of the world economy is mired with uncertainties. Despicable terrorist attacks and other forms of senseless violence which we have recently witnessed have an economic cost and further accentuate the difficulties of attracting solid investments and ensuring sustainable growth of our economies.

In addition to an already challenged global economy, we increasingly face unpredictable events which further undermine our capacity to map out long term strategies. One such black swan was the vote in favour of Brexit.

In such a context, UNCTAD has an important role to play and needs to have a strong mandate to frame a strategy that will help us realise the Sustainable Development Goals.

Moving from decision to action is no longer an option but an imperative. In the face of scarce resources, UNCTAD needs to prioritise its actions and to ensure that emphasis is laid on those most vulnerable to external shocks and those whose ability to pursue sustainable forms of development are severely threatened. This is particularly true for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

Like most SIDS, **Madam Chairperson,** Mauritius faces the inherent constraints of a small economy, absence of natural resources, geographical isolation, and high vulnerability to natural disasters.

Our strong reliance on trade, on food imports, the limitations on economic and export diversification due to size puts SIDS at high risk in the face of exogenous shocks.

Air and sea transport are the only options for the movement of goods and people, and the remote location of many SIDS entails high transport costs, which in turn further constrain the ability of SIDS to expand their economies.

The high vulnerability of SIDS to natural disasters increases the risk and volatility of economic activity. According to World Risks Report, Mauritius ranks 13th on the global index for highest disaster risk and 7th on the list of countries most exposed to natural hazards worldwide.

Added to this, is the fact that many SIDS which have now achieved middle income status, are caught in the middle income trap. Whilst countries which have achieved middle income status need significant investments in critical sectors of their economy so as to be able to achieve high income status, their middle income status bars them from concessional funding and other forms of development assistance when they most require this to move up on the development ladder.

The low amount of assistance that Mauritius has been able to mobilise in terms of ODA over the past fifteen years speaks for itself. Mauritius had received 300 million Euros under the 10th EDF, but only 9 million Euros under the 11th EDF.

Against such a background, **Madam Chairperson**, we wish to encourage UNCTAD to continue to engage on issues of primary concern to Small Island Developing States and to Least Developed Countries including on how to effectively implement the SAMOA pathway.

As an African Small Island Developing State, we wish to commend the Secretary-General for his active advocacy in favour of SIDS and in ensuring that they are not left behind in the 2030 Development Agenda.

Madam President,

Africa has witnessed a 15-year period of unprecedented economic growth and development and is an increasingly attractive place for investment and business. These achievements have brought about the emergence of Africa on the international scene.

I wish here to commend UNCTAD for the studies it has conducted in the past decades for the development of policies and actions supportive of inclusive and sustainable development on the African continent.

We would request UNCTAD to follow closely the issue of BREXIT and its likely economic impact on the African continent and the countries of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP) and to come forward with proposals for policy options to mitigate any negative effects.

Madam Chairperson,

The dynamics of trade have changed in many countries. Whilst some still face constraints in leveraging productive capacity and transforming their economies, others have realised that the major obstacles to trade remains the inability to tap into the vast array of opportunities in various markets.

At the level of Mauritius we understand the importance of Trade Facilitation and are actively engaged on the issue. We also realise that in the face of constraints arising from the realities of a small island developing state, the services industry will have to be an important component of our future development. Our participation in the Trade in Services Agreement is motivated by this.

We also acknowledge the importance of increased access to ICT and its leverage for enhanced trade and investment. Our participation in the Information Technology Agreement I and II demonstrates the vibrancy of our efforts in this direction.

As an ocean state with more than 2.3 m square kilometers of maritime zone, Mauritius has developed a strategy for the ocean economy which aims at transforming Mauritius into a hub for bunkering, cruise tourism, cargo handling and fisheries.

Madam Chairperson,

Throughout the fifty-two years of its existence, we have all consistently underscored the importance of UNCTAD in supporting developing countries' ability to take policy decisions based on studies conducted by the institution.

We must therefore come together to give a more prominent role to UNCTAD and adequate resources to carry out the mandate we have entrusted it with. We remain confident that UNCTAD will deliver on the high expectations we have of it.

Thank you Madam Chairperson.

Nairobi, 20 July 2016