Address by Hon. S. Moutia
Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms

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Conference Room, 1st floor, Cyber Tower 1

My Colleague, Hon. Mrs. Sheilabai Bappoo, Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity & Reform Institutions

Mr. Soobratty, PAS
Official of the Ministry

Chairpersons and Heads of Parastatals and Government Companies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon!

I am pleased to be with you all this afternoon at this working session in view of the integration of our citizens with other abilities in the world of work.
I thank my colleague, Mrs. Bappoo, the Minister responsible for the **portfolio of National Solidarity** for having extended the invitation to me.

Ladies and gentlemen, employability and employment of persons with disabilities is a matter of serious concern at the level of government which is committed to **put people first**.

In fact, I believe that Mrs. Bappoo has been exemplary in this respect. She has put the elderly and those physically challenged high on her people agenda.

You are certainly aware that, as a responsible government, we ratify all those conventions relating to human rights. We **value living with dignity** in our country and you will agree that government is laying much emphasis on **social integration**. The Prime Minister has created a **dedicated ministry** to that end.
We have come a long way since we celebrated the International Year for Disabled Persons in Mauritius for the first time in 1981.

However, we should not forget that long before the concern for persons with disabilities gained prominence in national and international debates, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam had supported the institution of the Society for the Welfare of the Blind. That was in 1946.

Sir Seewoosagur further reaffirmed his commitment towards the integration of persons with disabilities by ensuring that some form of positive discrimination be made to provide our citizens who had physical disabilities, as a result of polio, with employment in the SSRN hospital.

Polio victims were, in fact, provided with employment as hospital servants, telephone operators and even clerical
Assistants to perform filing duties. The practice was extended in the Ministry of Social Security.

Those citizens with physical disabilities have certainly experienced a very positive life in a work environment where they have been interacting with the mainstream society. It was a very avant-gardist move in those days.

It is the same spirit, the same philosophy that guides this government led by Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam. He has maintained the provisions for citizens deserving of state intervention despite the lingering global financial crisis.

Government recently brought amendments to the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Act to enforce employment of persons with other abilities in the different sectors. It is true that:
• while government is an **equal opportunity employer** valuing credentials and merit; and
• legal provisions exist for employers to arrange for the employment of persons with disabilities,

our realizations with regard to disability have fallen short of targets set by government.

This is why government has reaffirmed its **vision of an inclusive society** wherein persons with disabilities may be better integrated in the mainstream society.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are relying extensively on our human resource which is the main resource on which our economy depends. We are already dangerously gliding towards an **inverse dependency ratio** with 3 active persons to sustain 7 of our citizens living on state support.
We have some **45000 persons with disabilities** representing 3.75 % of the population. We are also having a high incidence of non-communicable diseases. Diabetes, hypertension and cardio-vascular problems will have their own impact on the population. Impaired vision, cardio-vascular accidents and amputations may leave us with an increasing number of persons with **ability deficiencies**.

Then, should we keep on writing off people from the world of work?

Is it the most appropriate strategy in a country fully dependent on its human resources?

Should we not, in the national interest, explore the potential of physically challenged persons?

The **write-off strategy** is not what is desirable.
I know a case of a police constable whose vision declined drastically as a result of a brain tumour. He was less than 40 years of age. Unfortunately, within the existing constraints in a disciplinary service, that person had to retire. There was no human resource strategy to retain the person in active employment.

The questions that come to my mind are:

- Whether that person could not have been allowed to serve in a clerical position or support service in the library or in any such position in the police department where his services could have been utilised?
- Whether there should not have been some form of flexibility to redeploy that person in the general services?
- Whether the Human Resource Department should not have come up with such a recommendation?

Ladies and Gentlemen, I remember having read somewhere a statement by the Prime Minister of Israel. I quote:
“… In the new world, you not only have the right to have rights but also have the right to be different…”

Unquote

It is, in fact, the recognition of this right of people to be different that guides government in its actions, especially in the case of persons with disabilities. Activists and agencies operating in the area of disability will certainly recall that the environment has been progressively retrofitted because:

- of the growing understanding by mainstream society of the right of people to be different;
- the mainstream society has become conscious that the environment handicaps the person;
- our society is conscious of the fact that the social environment was not conducive for the integration of people who are either born with or develop any form of disability.
You will agree that policy actions have progressively been adapted to social environment and people with some form of physical disabilities can now **move out of the house or institution** to undertake economic activities. We have also succeeded in **undoing the stigma associated with disability**.

Now, **we need smarter actions** for the integration in the world of work. Training aims at enhancing their employability. The recent amendments to the Act with regard to the employment of persons with disabilities are confirming the sustained effort of government.

What is expected of heads of parastatals and government companies?

Simply compliance with the law! We need to give the right signal to the private sector.
You have to play a key role in helping government with the implementation and, through your actions, set the example to employers.

This is the form of solidarity that the Minister responsible for the **Solidarity portfolio** expects from you.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you will give your full collaboration to **consolidate the spirit of national solidarity** in our country through compliance with the provisions of the Act.

Thank you for your attention!