

Speech by the Hon.Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection

Name: Hon. John Michael Tzoun Sao Yeung Sik Yuen

On Occasion of the 176th Annual General Meeting of the MCCI

President of the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry,
Members of the MCCI,
Members of the Press,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning,

It is a great pleasure to be with you today for this Annual General Meeting of the MCCI — a long-standing institution whose work in supporting the private sector, facilitating trade, and building regional and international bridges continues to be of relevance to our economy.

Let me begin by recognising the contributions of the MCCI, particularly over the past year. Your support to SMEs — notably through the *Xport Accelerator Programme* — has helped enterprises build capacity to access external markets. The Chamber's sustained engagement in regional economic integration, from COMESA to SADC and the Indian Ocean Rim, reflects a pragmatic approach to unlocking new opportunities.

Your work to modernise trade facilitation systems, including improvements to the *Tax Refund System for Tourists* and the *Origin Management System*, complements national digitalisation efforts. And your active engagement in public-private dialogue platforms is helping to shape a more responsive policy environment.

That said, MCCI does not operate in a vacuum. The ability of any private sector to flourish depends on the frameworks and vision set by the Government. And this Government has come forward with a bold programme — “*A Bridge to the Future*” — to reset and rebuild our economy on stronger, fairer, and more resilient foundations.

We are not here to glorify institutions. We are here to **build a true partnership** where government sets the strategic direction and creates stability, while business drives innovation and competitiveness.

One of our most urgent national imperatives is to **rebuild our productive base and boost exports**. Mauritius cannot rely on consumption alone to sustain economic growth.

Unfortunately, as the recent SBM Insights report points out, **goods exports fell to just 15.8% of GDP in 2024**, compared to an average of 18.5% over the past decade.

Our Export-Oriented Enterprises contracted by over 11% in 2023 and stagnated last year. These trends must be reversed.

That is why this Government is:

- Repositioning Mauritius within regional and global supply chains;
- Leveraging trade agreements such as African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AFCFTA), Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Partnership Agreement (CECPA), and AGOA;

- And reforming key institutions like the Economic Development Board to better support export diversification and market access.

At the same time, my Ministry **welcomes the inputs and collaboration of the MCCI** to help **eliminate trade barriers**, streamline processes, and address bottlenecks — especially in logistics.

Over the years, Mauritius has ratified **several trade agreements with over 85 countries** through regional and bilateral frameworks such as AGOA, COMESA, SADC, and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement and it **enjoys preferential market access to nearly 70% of the global population** through multiple Free Trade Agreements – opening doors to the developed economies of European Union, United States, United Kingdom as well as emerging markets of Africa, China, India, Pakistan and Turkey.

These agreements provide a vast market for our exporters, yet many opportunities remain underutilized. To fully capitalize on these trade preferences, my Ministry **will work on strengthening trade facilitation measures and reducing non-tariff barriers** that limit market access.

To further boost our exports, my Ministry will implement the **Electronic Certificate of Origin for COMESA**, a digital platform that will significantly reduce the time taken for certificate approvals. This initiative will allow exporters to ship goods faster while reducing operational costs, enhancing the ease of doing business.

Additionally, my Ministry will roll out **dedicated capacity-building programs for exporters**, focusing on compliance with international standards, certification processes, and market intelligence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We cannot ignore the fact that **Mauritius was ranked 369th out of 405 ports globally** in the World Bank Port Performance Index. This is not sustainable for an economy that depends on trade. That is why port reform, efficiency gains, and better connectivity are top government priorities.

We are also working with stakeholders to **digitise all trade processes** and make the system more transparent and predictable for businesses.

In the same spirit of collaboration, we count on the **support of the MCCI** as we advance the long-overdue work of **regulating e-commerce**, which has expanded rapidly in recent years but remains largely unchecked. Mauritius has strong international trade laws, but we still lag in market regulation, digital IP enforcement, and consumer dispute resolution.

This is not about overregulating. It is about building a system that ensures fair play, protects consumers, and encourages responsible digital trade.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me now touch on our broader macroeconomic outlook.

The World Bank forecasts **global growth at 2.7% for both 2025 and 2026**, with middle-income economies like ours expected to grow at 4% on average. For Mauritius, the Bank projects **5.6% GDP growth in 2024**, higher than both the national estimate and regional peers — but moderating thereafter to a more stable trajectory.

The Bank of Mauritius confirms that **growth is currently broad-based**, led by tourism, construction, financial services, and trade. On the demand side, consumption and investment are driving activity.

Yet, even with declining headline inflation — down to 3.6% in December 2024 — we must remain cautious. The cost of living remains a major concern for households and businesses alike.

This is why the Government is committed to:

- Fiscal consolidation and sound public finance,
- Strengthening the rupee and restoring monetary stability,
- And fighting speculative price hikes and unfair commercial practices.

We are implementing:

- **Structural reforms** to address market inefficiencies,
- **Monitoring mechanisms** for price transparency, and
- A more robust but fair regulatory framework.

Let me be clear: **we will do this in close consultation with the MCCI and other business bodies.** When regulation is needed, we will act. But our goal remains a business environment where ethics, innovation, and competition drive success — not speculation or market distortion.

We also know that building a resilient economy requires **stronger labour participation, especially among youth and women,** as well as **productivity reform.** Mauritius has seen **multifactor productivity growth of only 0.8% annually** over the last decade — this must improve if we are to compete globally.

This is why we are investing in skills development, innovation ecosystems, and national planning. The upcoming **National Research Institute,** as announced in our Government Programme, will help align science, innovation, and enterprise with economic goals.

And as the IMF and World Bank both warn, global headwinds — including protectionism, geopolitical shocks, and climate-related events — will continue to test all economies. Mauritius is no exception.

This is precisely why our path forward must be deliberate and inclusive.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We stand at a moment where **collaboration between Government and the private sector is not optional — it is essential.** Our economic future depends on a shared vision, mutual trust, and joint accountability.

Together, we can build a Mauritius that is export-ready, digitally smart, globally competitive, and socially fair.

Let us continue this journey — not as separate forces, but as committed partners walking across a common bridge to the future.

I thank you for your kind attention.