



**MINISTRY OF BUSINESS, ENTERPRISE & COOPERATIVES
(Business and Enterprise division)**

<u>Event</u>	:	LAUNCH OF CREATIVE MAURITIUS
<u>Location</u>	:	MCCI
<u>Date</u>	:	Monday 22 May @ 10h30

The President of MCCI, Mr. Azim Currimjee

The Chairman of SMEDA, Mr. Parama Valaydon

Mr. Raju Jadoo, Secretary General of MCCI

Mr. Phalraj Servansingh, Managing Director of SMEDA

The Permanent Secretary, Mr. Putchay

Members of the press

A very good morning to you.

It is today a proud moment for all stakeholders involved in the **Creative Mauritius** project as we are gathered to mark a milestone for the local handicraft sector.

Since the very first months of my mandate as Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives, I have always given a prominent place to the handicraft sector and craftsmen because of their unique contribution in enriching the cultural heritage of our country.



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Indeed, I believe in the relevance of handicraft in a society largely influenced by technology and the persistence of hand making thus definitely deserves consideration. What makes it so special is that handicraft is indeed one of the rare, most authentic and specific activity with a potential to supply a globalised and homogenised market place with **diversity and genuineness**.

Mauritian and Rodriguan handicrafts range from intricate miniatures to life size utilitarian, decorative and souvenir items manufactured, mostly from bio degradable, eco-friendly and sustainable raw materials such as wood, coconut, textiles and natural fibres. Most handicrafts produced are ship models, textile products, fashion jewelry, wooden objects, screen printed items, ceramics, basketry and allied products – **quite a rich plethora of items as you may notice**.

However, what is alarming is that estimates made by representatives of local craft manufacturers show that **more than Rs 200 million** of handicraft products sold in almost all private craft shops are imported on an annual basis, mainly from Asian countries (India, China, Malaysia), and Madagascar. Such a state of affairs is detrimental not only to our craftsmen but also to tourists buying those products, believing that they are hand-made locally.



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A Technical Committee was hence established in February 2016 under the chairmanship of my Ministry to address the situation. This committee had the specific mandate of identifying the various problems faced by local craftsmen and deciphering an action plan to give a much needed boost to the handicraft sector. The **use of the Internet as a strategic tool to establish market linkages for Mauritian craftsmen** was one of the key recommendations made, recommendations which were, besides, approved by Cabinet in April 2016.

By some fate of the calendar, we are today officially launching **Creative Mauritius** almost exactly one year after a first contact was initiated between the Chamber and my Ministry to discuss about the very same project. Together, we explored ways in which we could join forces to promote the local 'savoir-faire' and showcase operators of the handicraft industry on www.taxfreeshopping.mu, a website operated by the MCCI. This collaboration was then formalized on 15th of September 2016, with the signature of a **Memorandum of Understanding between the Chamber and SMEDA**.

In various forums, I have often stated that the nurturing of a collaborative relationship with the MCCI is a cause I hold dear. More than just being our main partner of the private sector, I think that we are in fact **natural partners supplementing each other's needs and aspirations for the business community**.



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This has been demonstrated on several occasions already and **Creative Mauritius** is a landmark in this perspective.

This online platform that will henceforth provide visibility and market linkages to craftsmen of Mauritius and Rodrigues is indeed **an unprecedented initiative** that stems out of the complementarity of our respective visions to efficiently promote the local handicraft sector.

A growing number of handicraft organisations in the world have begun to harness the power of ICT in response to the difficulties faced by craftsmen to tap markets in our highly liberalised world. The Internet is indeed becoming a very useful and strategic promotional tool in countries having a strong handicraft tradition and is being fully utilized to raise awareness, both locally and internationally, on the existence and quality of handicraft.

Mauritius now joins the league and this is a matter of satisfaction. With **Creative Mauritius**, the freshly introduced cultural component of the Tax Free Shopping website of the MCCI, craft operators from Mauritius and Rodrigues who are registered with SMEDA now have **a webpage of their own** with a description of their products, a photo gallery, their contact details as well as a geo-tracking feature which will enable tourists to find their way to them.



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Stakeholders of the handicraft sector will acknowledge that **this first of its kind online platform** will provide an unparalleled visibility to local talent and know-how, with an access to the tourist market that will, from now on, know no bounds for craftsmen. This confers a brand new dimension to the promotion of Mauritian handicraft on the international stage and the handicraft community can rest assured about the well established reputation of the Tax Free Shopping website among tourists and related operators, which will in any case be subjected to an intensive marketing campaign in view of scaling up its visibility even more with this new component.

I hereby wish to put on record the dedication and strong coordination skills demonstrated by the SMEDA team which has worked on the realization of this project. SMEDA indeed established contact with craft operators of Mauritius and Rodrigues and selected the most appropriate candidates for the platform. They also provided relevant assistance to artisans with regards to the completion of the online data sheets to be uploaded to the Creative Mauritius section.

My heartfelt appreciation naturally goes to the MCCI for its constructive contribution in providing us with a concrete and effective means to achieve the strategic vision formulated at government level when it comes to the handicraft sector. Our collaboration is, I believe, a prime example of the complicity that can exist between the public and the private sector in the national interest.



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Furthermore, I would like all craftsmen of Mauritius and Rodrigues to take stock of the major innovation happening today, which is a cause for optimism not only for the MCCI and my Ministry, but most importantly for them, as they are now the beneficiaries of **a more strategic and smarter approach** to development in their sector.

The major thrust of our commitment towards the sector is on **result oriented and market-driven interventions** focusing on **empowering artisans** through a variety of enhancements. There is still a lot to do for handicraft, notably with measures to be taken for the **Handicraft Training Academy** and the **Craft Lab** to run in full swing mode to provide the best possible assistance to craftsmen. In the context of the **2nd Joint Working Committee** between Mauritius and the Republic of India, I also requested Shri Kalraj Mishra, the Minister of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, to extend the help of the Government of India in our effort to revamp the Handicraft sector into a resilient industry by, for example, deputing a Master Craftsman for the training of trainers and of local artisans.

I am also given to understand that the Tax Free Shopping website will from now on offer **a new e-payment solution** and thus **broaden horizons even more** for our local craftsmen through e-commerce.



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My Ministry's commitment to craftsmen of Mauritius and Rodrigues is based on a long-term handicraft sector strategy and I am confident that with Private sector participation, handicraft will consistently benefit from **a more business focused approach**. Creative Mauritius is concrete evidence of this fact.

Handicraft from Mauritius and Rodrigues are a cherished aspect of our way of life. Their extensive range reflects our country's diversity and infinite creativity. Our craftsmen are creators of identity who have developed their own, often unique, methods and techniques of bringing life into stone, metal, wood or and clay. **This is something to be honoured and I believe that Creative Mauritius does it in the most exquisite manner.**

I once again take this opportunity to thank all parties involved in the realization of this project as well as our craftsmen for their creative efforts. And I hope that they will pursue those efforts to take full advantage of the new gateway that is opening to them.

Thank you for your attention.