**Inputs in the field of Cultural Rights – Republic of Mauritius**

**Inputs on Cultural Rights**

Cultural Rights are rights related to arts and culture. The objective of these rights is to guarantee that people and communities have a free access to culture and can participate in the culture of their choice. Cultural rights are human rights that aim at assuring the enjoyment of culture based on equality, human dignity and non-discrimination. They are rights related to themes such as language; cultural and artistic production; participation in cultural life; cultural heritage; intellectual property rights; author’s rights and the enhancement of human happiness.

(i) Different Cultural Centres have been set up by way of legislation, namely the Mauritius Marathi Cultural Centre, Mauritius Telugu Cultural Centre, Mauritius Tamil Cultural Centre, Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture and the Islamic Cultural Centre, amongst others to carry out activities which promote intercultural dialogue and foster mutual cultural understanding.

(ii) The Ministry of Arts and Culture, through its various departments and parastatals operating under its aegis, fosters a balanced and harmonious Mauritian Society through consolidation of existing pluralism, promotion of creativity and the celebration of cultural values. The Ministry, with the support of all its parastatal organisations also help in promoting our cultural rights through the organization of lectures, seminars, workshops, exhibitions and other activities where people unite and contribute in the sharing of intercultural dialogue and better understanding of our cultural diversity. This helps in sharing our cultural rights to the whole population at large while safeguarding our cultural heritage;

(iii) The Ministry of Arts and Culture continuously promotes artistic creativity in all its forms and regional national and international cultural cooperation, and acknowledges their importance in the process of creation, production and dissemination. The Ministry in all its actions recognizes respect for cultural pluralism, policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens that guarantee social cohesion and the vitality of civil society and peace, enhance cultural development and contribute to sustainable development;

(iv) The Ministry of Arts and Culture also promotes Mauritius as a hub of cultural diversity by sustaining the development of a dynamic artistic and cultural environment. It also empowers artists, creators and performers to develop the creative industries as a key pillar of the Mauritian economy. It also safeguards and promotes tangible and intangible national cultural heritage for sustainable economic growth;

(v) The Ministry of Arts and Culture also enhances cultural links with other countries, as well as with regional and international organisations through the Cultural Exchange Programmes, bilateral and multilateral cooperation;

(vi) The right of access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage are being strengthened – Mauritius is a party to various UNESCO Conventions;

(vii) ‘Sega Tipik’ was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2014. It is a way of promoting and preserving our cultural rights;

(viii) “Geet Gawai” – Mauritius Bhojpuri Folk Songs – was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2016;

(ix) ‘Sega Tambour’ of Rodrigues was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 07 December 2017;

(x) The Ministry also identified and opened a public access to Le Morne Brabant Mountain of Le Morne World Heritage Site, on 24 July 2016, after 8 years of its inscription as a World Heritage Site;

(xi) In the Budget for the year 2017 – 2018, the Government of Mauritius allocated a budget of Rs 30 million for the rehabilitation and restoration of national heritage. Thirteen (13) sites have been identified for this purpose and seven (7) have been completed. Measures are also being taken to provide facilities to the disabled to enjoy our national heritage and cultural rights;

(xii) The Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture is working towards a better memorialization of the economic and cultural contribution of the slaves to Mauritius through a roving exhibition entitled: ‘Kontribisyon Esklav dan Konstriksion nou Pei’ (Translation: Contribution of slaves in the development of our country). Each year, the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture conducts research, publish and disseminate information with respect to all aspects of slavery and slave trade;

(xiii) Mauritius is one of the pioneer African countries to work on the Status of Artist Bill. The Ministry of Arts and Culture with the support of UNESCO launched an initiative to design a new legislation to professionalize the status of artists in Mauritius;

(xiv) The Ministry of Arts and Culture, through the Centres de Formation Artistique, provides short term training courses to children and adults, amongst others, in the following disciplines: Guitar, Tabla, Ravanne playing and Violin (Indian, Western). The objectives of the training courses, which are provided free of charge, are as follows:

• Identification of new artistic talents;

• Provision of appropriate ‘encadrement’ to artists;

• Capacity building in the artistic field;

(xv) The Copyright Act of 1997 was reviewed and replaced by the Copyright Act 2014. Provisions are made to:

• increase the length of the duration of copyright;

• make better provisions in relation to the payment of equitable remuneration;

• enlist members for the Mauritius Society of Authors;

(xvi) Genealogy: Data on genealogy is made available free of charge to Mauritians to enable them to reconstruct their family tree. The Research Unit of the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture is providing a Genealogy Service free of charge. The staff of the Centre assists Mauritians of African origin to trace out their genealogy. Moreover, the information is available online on the website of the Centre to facilitate researchers and the general public;

(xvii) The National Heritage Fund is being upgraded to strengthen the law for a better safeguarding, protecting and building awareness of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including traditional knowledge systems;

(xviii) The Ministry also provides assistance to socio-cultural organisations to enable them to promote culture through cultural gatherings at regional and grass root levels. Such practice enhances cultural exchanges between Mauritians and promotes a peaceful and inclusive society;

(xix) Financial assistance is also provided to artists and group of artists to enable them to engage in their artistic pursuits locally and abroad irrespective of their gender, race, cultural and religious beliefs, political opinions, social class, sexual preference and physical abilities/disabilities, therefore reducing inequalities;

(xx) The Government will provide a wider and enhanced spectrum of cultural products and services to the public, including the holding of an international film festival. The first edition of the Mauritius Cinema Week was held from 05 to 08 October 2017, in the context of the celebration of the 50 years of Independence of Mauritius. The objectives of the Mauritius Cinema Week were, inter alia, to promote the film industry and the Film Rebate Scheme to International film producers and celebrities from the global cinema industry. The Cinema Week focused on celebrity marketing so as to position Mauritius as an attractive film production location, consequently boosting the tourism industry. A second edition has just been held from 18 – 20 October 2018;

(xxi) A white paper on Creative Mauritius – vision 2025 was published in September 2014;

(xxii) The Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site was restored from 2004 to 2010 providing secure access to visitors as well as providing access to all in Mauritius and from abroad to the Aapravasi Ghat being a corner stone in Mauritian history.

In 2014, the Government of Mauritius proceeded with the inauguration of Beekrumsing Ramlallah Interpretation Centre at the World Heritage Site, providing a permanent exhibition space on the history of indenture in Mauritius. The Interpretation Centre offers free entrance to Mauritians and foreigners.

These two projects participated in enlarging access to heritage in the country as well as disseminating information on the history of Mauritius and foster participatory approaches and a wide array of cultural initiatives. The Management Plan of the World Heritage Site makes provision for the implementation of projects and activities that foster the participation of the local community as well as the public at large. It also makes provision for a Consultative Committee that meets once a year to disseminate information on the development at World Heritage Site in terms of projects and activities.

Exhibitions, publications and educational activities take place every year to raise awareness on the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site and this enable participation of all concerned in decision making processes that have an impact on cultural rights. The Consultative Committee gathers ideas, comments and complaints of the local community. These comments are taken into consideration in the implementation of projects and activities.

The comments of the local community were taken into consideration in a number of occasions including for the preparation and issue of the Planning Policy Guidance 6 regulating development in the buffer zone of the World Heritage Site (2011);

(xxiii) Le Morne Cultural Landscape was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 2008. It is a world-renowned icon in the legacy of Slavery, located in Mauritius which is the country to where slaves were imported from the highest diversity of origin countries, and from where slaves were shipped out to highest diversity of destinations. Its layered history of oppression spans several centuries of the history of Mauritius. Le Morne Cultural Landscape World Heritage Property is recognised as symbolising Outstanding Universal Value in the resistance against slavery – a fight for freedom and sacrifice, a symbol of the high price that humans will pay to retain their freedom by choosing death over captivity. Thus, this World Heritage Site has become a physical rallying point for resistance against slavery worldwide.

(xxiv) Bhojpuri was brought by the Indian Indentured immigrants, majority hailing from Bihar and Bhojpuri Belt of India as from 2nd November 1834, and at one time was the lingua franca of the island spoken and understood by all sections of the Mauritian population. Its songs and dances are enjoyed and appreciated by all sections of the modern generation.

Moreover, Bhojpuri is a recognized language by the State which has created a Bhojpuri Speaking Union (BSU) which operates under the aegis of Ministry of Arts and Culture. Every year, the Bhojpuri Speaking Union participates in the International Mother Language Day decreed by UNESCO on 21st February 2018.

Furthermore, it should be brought to the knowledge that the Mauritius Bhojpuri Folk Songs is the vehicle of the Geet Gawai songs and is, therefore, an important element of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mauritius and World Humanity.

More importantly, it is required to be transmitted to the younger generations. The well-preserved mosaic and fabric of the Bhojpuri linguistic and cultural heritage matrix also contributed to the Aapravasi Ghat becoming a World Heritage Site of UNESCO.

The Geet Gawai is a rich legacy preserved by the Indian immigrants and their descendants not only in Mauritius but in other diasporic countries which have Bhojpuri as a linguistic heritage and culture of origin such as in Fiji, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Guyana, in different forms. The listing of Geet Gawai at UNESCO has given it a universal visibility.”

(xxv) Government has set up a Task Force to ensure that Mauritians of different faith are given support in celebrating their culture through religious ceremonies. Public Holidays have been decreed for Thaipoosam Cavadee, Maha Shivaratree, Chinese Spring Festival, Ougadi, Eid-ul-Fitr, Ganesh Chaturthi, Divali and Christmas; and two commemorative events, namely,

(xxvi) Government provides financial assistance for artists for artistic creation up to Rs 800,000 for artistic projects.