

Speech for Honorable Minister

**Opening Ceremony for Workshop
and
Launching of Activities
for
World Breastfeeding Week 2015**

Date: Tuesday 4 August 2015

Venue: Gold Crest Hotel, Quatre Bornes

Time: 09 30 hours

Miss H.C.L. How Fok Cheung, Senior Chief Executive

Dr Timol, Ag Director General Health Services

Directors Health Services

Regional Health Directors

Representatives of Ministries

Representatives of Private Organisations and NGOs

Union Leaders

Dear Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here this morning on the occasion of the World Breastfeeding Week 2015. World Breastfeeding Week was initiated in 1992 by the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action, and is celebrated every year from 01 to 07 August in more than 120 countries to commemorate the 1990 Innocenti Declaration of the World Health Assembly. The overall objective of this Declaration is to promote a “breastfeeding culture” as opposed to a “bottle-feeding culture”. In Mauritius, WBW is celebrated each year since 1993.

The call is for concerted global action to support women to combine breastfeeding and work. Whether a woman is working in the formal, non-formal or home setting, it is necessary that she is empowered to claim her and her baby's right to breastfeed and be breastfed.

The theme chosen for this year's World Breastfeeding Week is thus "**Breastfeeding and Work: Let's Make it Work**". This theme is particularly appropriate given the changing landscape of family structures and employment patterns around the world, with more and more women in employment. This has a direct impact on infant care.

The objectives for 2015, in respect to the theme are to:

- i. galvanise multi-dimensional support from all sectors to enable women everywhere to work and breastfeed;

- ii. promote actions by employers to become Family/Parent/Baby and Mother-Friendly, and to actively participate and support employed women to continue breastfeeding;
- iii. update the population on global Maternity Protection entitlements, and raise awareness of the need to strengthen related national legislation and implementation;
- iv. strengthen, facilitate and showcase supportive practices that enable women working in the informal sector to breastfeed; and
- v. engage with target groups such as Trade Unions, Workers Rights Organisations, Women's groups and Youth groups, to protect the breastfeeding rights of women in the workplace.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Modern lifestyles are having a negative impact on

breastfeeding. Reconciling work with motherhood is not easy and at a time when maternity can wreck career prospects, women face very difficult choices.

In Mauritius, as you have just heard, the period of maternity leave has recently been extended from 12 to 14 weeks. The aim is to develop a strategy to improve breastfeeding practice in Mauritius.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You know that breast milk is the best source of nutrition and protection for the baby. It has a profound impact on a child's survival, health, nutrition and develops a unique bond between mother and baby. Breastmilk has no substitute, despite all technological strides made by mankind. It has the right amount of fat, protein, sugar, water and micronutrients needed for a baby's growth and development of behaviour, speech, sense of

wellbeing and security. By its very nature, breast milk is meant for easy digestion by babies. Studies have shown that children who are breastfed have a more developed immune system. Breastmilk is thus like vaccination to children. It has also been proved that breastfed babies have a higher Intelligent Quotient (IQ).

Breast milk prevents ear infections, diarrhea, respiratory infections, asthma, allergies, obesity, type 1 and type 2 diabetes, childhood leukemia and in the worst cases, sudden infant death syndrome or SIDS.

I am also informed that, the more the mother breastfeeds, the more milk she will produce. This highlights the need to keep the breast active so that mothers can continue breastfeeding.

Research is still ongoing as whether inadequate breastfeeding is a cause of breast cancer, ovarian cancer,

postpartum depression, obesity and uterine and other cancers which unfortunately affect women.

Breastfeeding can also help mothers to lose the excess fat which accumulates during pregnancy. It is therefore extremely important that exclusive breastfeeding is encouraged for six months after birth, and continued breastfeeding is promoted for 2 years and beyond with a gradual introduction of complementary feeding. This will enhance the health and well being of infants and children.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

According to the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action, there are three key factors that determine success in the promotion of breastfeeding: time, space/proximity and support. Time relates to the period of maternity leave and flexible working hours, space/proximity pertains to the availability of adequate

physical space for breastfeeding and expression of breastmilk and support derives from employers, unions, co-workers and the nation at large.

This workshop which will start today will enable stakeholders to brainstorm on these three key factors, and any others that may be identified, and I hope that all these factors will contribute to the development of a conducive environment for Mauritius. I am also informed that this workshop will facilitate discussions on the constraints envisaged and the overall implications of introducing such a practice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My Ministry is committed to promoting maternal and child health, which includes breastfeeding.

We have a good network of primary health care centres

providing regular maternal and child health care services including ante-natal and post-natal care.

The goal of the current UNFPA Country Programme which is being implemented “to improve the quality of life of the population in the Republic of Mauritius through increased access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS Services to all while taking on board gender issues, with a focus on vulnerable women and young people”.

My Ministry will to set up a National Breastfeeding Committee and Regional Committees in all hospitals to ensure proper collection and evaluation of statistics on breastfeeding, ethical marketing and sale of breast milk substitutes and continuous training of health personnel in breastfeeding.

These will be broadcast on radio and TV in Creole and Bhojpuri to sensitize people about the benefits of breastfeeding.

I would like to reiterate that breastfeeding is more than a lifestyle choice-It is an important health choice for mothers and babies.

For those who are conversant with Shakespeare let me quote to you an extract from Macbeth. Macbeth is known for other things but Lady Macbeth says this: “I have given suck and I know how tender it is to love the babe that milks me”. This conjures such a beautiful image of mother and child. Breastfeeding can be extremely rewarding both for the one feeding and the one who is fed.

I have now the pleasure to launch the activities to mark the World Breastfeeding Week 2015 and declare today’s workshop open.

Thank you for your attention.