

**Statement by Sir Seewoosagur RAMGOOLAM on the
admission of Mauritius to the United Nations 24
April 1968**

Mr. President.

I should like to express to you and to all the distinguished representatives my cordial thanks for the admission of my country to the United Nations. My special thanks go to those Member States which have so generously sponsored and cosponsored our application for membership. It is gratifying to acknowledge the wide response and welcome Mauritius has received from Members of the United Nations. By this act, you have given formal consecration to the accession of Mauritius to the status of a sovereign independent State. Although I come from a small country, my Government and the people of Mauritius are very conscious of the honour of belonging to this great Assembly, and we can assure you that we shall strive to uphold the great ideals which are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and will play fully our part in the struggle for justice, racial equality, peace and understanding among nations.

This is indeed a solemn moment in the history of my country. I stand here in all humility, in the midst of this great world community as the symbol of the hope of my people that through the effort of the United Nations mankind will really see the ultimate fulfillment and practical realization of the principles and purposes to which men and women in this august Assembly have dedicated themselves. In that grand and noble endeavour, we as a small nation will bring our contribution, however modest it may be, to the shaping of the destiny of a better world— a contribution which we hope will lead towards a new and broader world civilization in which man's essential needs will transcend considerations of national self-interest.

I also bring to you, Mr. President and distinguished representatives, the greetings and good wishes of my country which after successive periods of colonization by the Dutch, the French and the British, is now looking forward to an era of fruitful collaboration and partnership with all nations.

Mauritius has a rich historical background and it has in the past played a notable part in some of the great events which have molded the course of history. Mauritius is a densely populated island, and over an area of 720 square miles live a population of almost 800,000. It is a view commonly held among some scholars that our Island was visited by Dravidian seamen in pre-Aryan days, and during the time of their great awakening, the Arabs sighted

Mauritius in the early part of the Christian era while plying between India and the Red Sea.

However, it was the Dutch who took formal possession of the Island in the 17th century and gave it its present name. But colonization proper was started earnestly by the French who succeeded the Dutch, and France has left its lasting imprint on the history of Mauritius. Such indeed has been the impact of French culture and civilization on the life of the people that even those who came from other lands have been profoundly influenced by it. The meeting of the peoples of Asia, Africa, and the West in Mauritius has enriched our precious heritage, and as I said in France during my last visit:

"Sovereign Mauritius will ally itself still more closely with France, as with the other countries from which our forefathers came. Thus this remote island in the Indian Ocean will become one of the most important meeting places of East and West" .

Towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars, in 1810, Britain conquered Mauritius. Because of the island's proximity with India, Mauritius was captured from the French with the help of Indian troops from Bengal, Madras and Ceylon. British power in the Indian Ocean became supreme after the annexation of Mauritius to the British Crown and British rule was to last until the accession of Mauritius to independence on 12 March 1968. In the course of European colonization of Mauritius, people from Africa and Asia came to its shores and they have all played a decisive part in the progress and development of the island. Ever since, the people of Mauritius have been trying to promote the maintenance of contrasted cultures within the framework of a wider community to which each group could contribute its own share.

It is indeed true to say that although Mauritius has drawn its cultural inspiration from Africa, Asia and Europe, yet it has succeeded to a remarkable degree in evolving a distinct Mauritian way of life. The visitor to Mauritius is impressed by the fact that the average Mauritians have more in common with each other than with the native inhabitants of the land of their forbears. Indeed, it has been the privilege of my small country that its citizens have inherited the influence of the best traditions of the East and of the West. And this influence is noticeable in the works of our poets and writers as has just been pointed out by many speakers who have preceded me.

I spoke a little while ago of the basic principles of the United Nations and of its work for the oppressed peoples who have been struggling for the recognition of their rights to nationhood. We are all here pledged to this great ideal, and indeed all Member States have with great fervour and

dedication been working to achieve these great ends we all hold in common. But it is still unfortunately true that in many areas of the world denial of human rights, hatred and violence are still raising their ugly heads, and human beings are being subjected to segregation from one another because of the colour of their skin or their ways of life which appear alien to the selfish outlook of a small minority. It is a statistical fact that more than half of the world's population is forced to live in conditions where human dignity and social justice have hardly any meaning. Even in some of the progressive countries which have been the bulwark of democracy, men of goodwill are constantly trying to find a formula by which the under-privileged can banish inequality and fear and aspire to a place in the sun.

We in Mauritius have a long tradition of mutual respect, tolerance and understanding, despite the occasional evil exploitation of our diversity. Our social customs and habits have transcended racial and cultural differences. Although much has been achieved in the past two years in the field of economic and social development, Mauritius, like other developing countries, is bedeviled by the rapid rate of population growth. As a sequel, unemployment is a cause of great anxiety, for the rapid increase in the birth rate is a constant and positive threat to our present standard of living. We are taking steps to contain this serious population explosion, and to counteract it a comprehensive programme of family planning is being launched.

Fully conscious of the seriousness of the problem, the Mauritian Government has embarked on the diversification of our economy. Great efforts are also being made to stimulate the production of tea, tobacco and food crops, and a number of manufacturing industries have been set up. We have also been giving careful consideration to the possibilities of emigration as a means of easing our unemployment problem. In this respect I am glad to say that a large number of Mauritians who have emigrated to countries like Britain, Australia and Canada are actively contributing towards the development of those countries. I should like to add that Mauritian workers are efficient, intelligent and adaptable, and have proved to be an asset to those countries which have welcomed them. We all know that there are yet many large areas of the world available for settlement, whereas in other territories like Mauritius there is a serious surplus of human resources. It is precisely in this vital task of revolutionizing the social and economic set-up of Mauritius that my people are looking forward to a close and fruitful partnership with Member States of the United Nations.

Here, with your permission, Mr. President, I should like to avail myself of this opportunity to express the gratitude of my Government and my country for the help and assistance that have already come to us from these quarters and the various United Nations agencies; and I might add in this context how deeply indebted we are to countries like Britain, France, India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America and Pakistan, which have sympathized in a practical way with the problems we have been facing.

We are very much aware of the fact that economic stability and world peace depend so much on the understanding between individual groups at a national level, as well as in the field of international relations, and on the success achieved by many countries in their efforts to give a reasonable standard of living to their populations. It is in this great task of bridging the gap between the rich and the poor that we join our efforts to dedicate ourselves, together with other Member States forming part of this Assembly.

To conclude, allow me on behalf of my delegation and my country to renew our pledge to carry out our obligations under the United Nations Charter and our firm determination to stand by the great principles which inspire this comity of nations in its pursuit of peace and happiness.