

Opening Remarks

Dr. Hon. (Mrs.) Dorine Chukowry

Minister of Commerce & Consumer Protection

Validation Workshop

Strategic Plan – Price Observatory

31 August 2023

- Hon. Soodesh Callichurn, Minister of Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development & Training
- Mrs Mathur Dabidin, Permanent Secretary of my Ministry
- Dr Moorghen, Chairperson of the Price Observatory Committee
- Members of the Price Observatory Committee
- Representatives of Public and Private institutions
- Members of the Press
- Distinguished guests
- Ladies and gentlemen
- All protocol observed

Good morning.

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be in your midst this morning for my first official function as Minister for the opening of this Workshop for the validation of the

Price Observatory Committee's Strategic Plan 2023-2026.

I seize this opportunity to congratulate my predecessor, the former Minister of Commerce, Hon. Callichurn, for this excellent initiative and good work.

Let me first of all congratulate the Price Observatory Committee for the commendable work which has resulted into the elaboration of this well-thought strategic document which paves the way for the smooth running of the Price Observatory and by extension a better consumer awareness and protection structure.

Allow me also to highlight the vision of this Government, through the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection, which has taken the bold initiative of revamping the Price Observatory system which was found to be obsolete and did not really serve its initial purpose in the face of a continuously evolving trade landscape.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As newly appointed Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection, I will make it a point to remind the population that a constantly improving consumer protection system with all the necessary mechanisms and consumer friendly tools remains high on the agenda of my Ministry and the Government, under the able leadership of our Prime Minister.

And this is not a mere statement. The population will appreciate that we have till now walked the talk. It is in our DNA to make things happen and honour our commitments.

We, as a Government, set the vision and provide the required leadership and orientation. But Government alone cannot do everything. We need the support of each and everyone.

In that connection, I am pleased to see that our privileged partners, namely the members of the different

bodies such as the Price Observatory Committee, the Competition Commission Mauritius, the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the consumer protection organisations, among others, trust in the Government's vision and are always willing to contribute to the efforts and strategies towards a better and inclusive society where consumer rights take precedence, and where no one is left behind. The more so in a global economic context where the prices of numerous essential commodities are soaring and are affecting the purchasing power.

Distinguished participants,

My Ministry is leaving no stone unturned in its quest to ensure that each and every citizen of this country has access to essential commodities at reasonable prices.

While the whole World was going through tough times, particularly with the negative impacts of the two back-to-back shocks which hit Mauritius like many other countries, namely the Covid-19 pandemic and the

Russia-Ukraine war, we have not hesitated to come forward with the introduction of subsidies followed by price controls on a series of essential commodities.

Talking of these two shocks, and keeping in mind that Mauritius is highly dependent on imports, allow me to lay emphasis on the meticulous exercise which is carried out by my Ministry when devising policies to protect consumers, specially in hard times. And this exercise is well described in the document that is at the heart of today's validation process.

I am here referring to the direct and indirect consequences of internal and external factors leading to soaring prices. For example, regarding external factors, in addition to the effects of the Covid-19 and the Russia-Ukraine war, we must not oblivate climate change, imported inflation, energy prices, freight costs, exchange rates, political factors and international market forces, among others.

As regards the internal factors, the examples are multiple: the market forces which is related to the demand and supply, budgetary and financial policies, the supply of essential goods and, very important also, the consumption pattern and consumer behaviour.

At this stage, I would like to underscore the fact that the Price Observatory Committee is called upon to be proactive. For the time being, prices of commodities are collected at a specific interval but alternative approaches could be envisaged. For example, real time price collection, reviewing the basket of goods and even the extension of the timing of information collection.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To give a greater impetus to the work being carried out towards the creation of a wider protection net to consumers, we even went further.

Hence, on 18 May last, my predecessor, Hon. Callichurn, had the honour to officially launch the

MOPRI mobile App which is accessible to everyone and which gives an overview of the retail prices of some 100 commodities – that is more than 450 brands. This tool is no doubt of great help for consumers as it allows them to analyse and compare prices and therefore make intelligent decisions when purchasing the products they need.

At the level of my Ministry, we are pleased to note that since the launching in May 2023, thousands of people have downloaded the MOPRI App. Moreover, some 19 complaints of different nature, have been received from consumers, out of which 14 have been settled and closed while the 2 others require some verifications.

And as already announced, my Ministry is working on the necessary legal framework which will make it compulsory for supermarkets to be engaged on the MOPRI platform.

All these initiatives bear testimony of our determination to strive by the side of the population against the difficult global economic situation and the soaring of prices which are beyond our control.

Before leaving the floor, allow me to, once again, congratulate and thank the members of the Price Observatory Committee for the relentless efforts which led to the elaboration of this Strategic Plan 2023-2026.

I wish the Committee good luck for its future endeavours which will undoubtedly contribute towards a reinforced consumer protection system.

Dear participants, I wish you fruitful deliberations.

I thank you for your kind attention.

I officially declare the Workshop open.

M.C.D.C

31 August 2023