**Speech of the British High Commission,**

**His Excellency Mr. Keith Allan**

**Business Continuity and Resilience Planning (BCRP)**

**Programme Launching**

**NPCC Training Room, Ebène**

**18 November 2020**

Good morning. Honourable Minister of Industrial Development, SMEs and Cooperatives, Mr Bholah, NPCC executives, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you to the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council (NPCC) for inviting me to the launch of the e-course on ‘Business Continuity Management’.

The global economy is facing unprecedented challenges in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Governments are rightly under pressure to do all they can to support business and employees. I am pleased to see that the NPCC is playing its part. The British High Commission, including our Department for International Trade (DIT) team work closely with the NPCC and other bodies to support and develop business between our two countries. Our COVID-19 Fund is designed to support recovery.

The UK is the number one export market for Mauritius with bilateral trade in goods and services worth almost £1 billion in 2019. COVID-19 has of course had an enormous impact on trade and investment but we are working hard to mitigate the impact. In this regard, we are pleased to be funding the NPCC project ‘Strengthening business resilience of enterprises (SMEs) in the face of disasters’. Today’s launch of the e-course on ‘Business Continuity Management’ is part of this support. Ensuring business continuity and resilience never been more important.

SMEs have been described as the ‘engine of the economy’, so it is vital that they receive support. A few examples of the importance of SMEs to the UK:

* At the start of 2020 there were 5.94 million small businesses (with 0 to 49 employees), 99.3% of the total business. SMEs account for 99.9% of the business population (6.0 million businesses).
* SMEs account for three fifths of the employment and around half of turnover in the UK private sector.
* Total employment in SMEs was 16.8 million (61% of the total), whilst turnover was estimated at £2.3 trillion (52%).
* Employment in small businesses (with 0 to 49 employees) was 13.3 million (48% of the total), with a turnover of £1.6 trillion (36%).

In terms of government support for small businesses during the COVID-19 crisis, these are a few examples of what has been available:

* The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme , which allows companies to claim for 80% of furloughed employees’ usual monthly wage, costs.
* Bounce Back Loans , which will, will help small and medium-sized businesses to borrow between £2,000 and £50,000 with no fees or interest to pay for the first 12 months.
* The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme to support long-term viable businesses who may need to respond to cash flow pressures by seeking additional finance.

In January this year, we hosted the UK Africa Investment Summit in London. I was delighted that Prime Minister Jugnauth was able to attend. The Summit was designed to signal a step-change in the UK’s commitment to UK-Africa partnership by: driving investment across Africa; encouraging win-win job-creating business partnerships; and supporting African countries in their ambition to transform their economies.

The world is of course in a very different place now but our commitment to seeing that step-change in UK trade and investment with Africa remains. In January 2021, the Department for International Trade (DIT) will host a virtual UK Africa Investment Conference as a direct follow-up to the Summit. We very much look forward to that and will share further details with you when available.

I wanted to say a few words about climate change given its impact on the economy and jobs. The UK will host the COP26 Climate Change conference in Glasgow in November 2021. We all have a role in increasing global momentum on climate action. We owe it to current and future generations to base our recovery from COVID-19 on solid foundations, including a fairer, greener, and more resilient global economy.

Just last week we hosted a ‘One Year to COP26’ event in partnership with the Government of Mauritius and the United Nations as a means of raising awareness and encouraging ambition towards November 2021. The Honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change joined us. We heard about the new Climate Change Bill that has recently been tabled in Parliament. I continue to urge the government to be brave and ambitious!

In conclusion, let me once again thank the NPCC for all it does to support business and jobs. We are pleased to support SMEs through this project. SMEs are the engine of the economy. We must look after that engine, ‘oil that engine’. Only by working together can we truly protect and support our businesses, economies and jobs. Thank you.