



Embassy of the United States of America
Port Louis, Mauritius

OP-ED

By U.S. Ambassador Shari Villarosa

Earth Day: The Face of Climate Change

I arrived in the beautiful island of Mauritius a few months ago and enjoy wandering the streets of Port Louis at lunchtime, buying fresh vegetables from the central market, and finding hidden treasures. The terrible flooding of March 30 touched me and my staff, as it touched each and every one of you. This event reminds us of the vulnerabilities that we all face as our climate changes. It calls for action by each of us to reduce pollution and waste, prepare ourselves and our communities for the consequences of climate change, and accelerate the transition to clean energy. Each of us can do something to prevent future flooding, not just for Earth Day, but also in memory of those 11 tragic faces.

The global theme for Earth Day this year is “The Face of Climate Change.” This theme, chosen by the Earth Day Network, recognizes the impact of climate change on human beings and the environment while calling for a more sustainable future. President Obama in his February State of the Union speech highlighted the increasing intensity and frequency of heat waves, droughts, wildfires and floods to urge action now to combat climate change. Mauritius has not been spared. The impact of climate change on Mauritius includes more frequent episodes of drought and flooding, reduction of wildlife habitats, bleaching of the coral reefs, and erosion of the shoreline. Mauritius also recognizes the need to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change, and will have a good partner in the United States.

So what can we do? Together we can craft ambitious agreements to reduce emissions that all countries will implement. Working with our international partners of the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, the United States seeks to reduce non-CO2 pollutants such as methane, black carbon, and hydro-fluorocarbons, which account for one-third of global

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warming. Reducing these pollutants will result in a meaningful reduction in global temperatures.

The United States has made substantial progress in reducing carbon emissions, which are now at their lowest levels in 20 years. The U.S. has played a leading role in developing technology to make clean energy cheaper and more efficient. Methane emissions in the U.S. have fallen by 20 percent, as industry and agriculture upgrade equipment and extend methane-capture techniques. Together, the U.S. and Mauritius conducted the Coastal East Africa Solid Waste Management workshop last year to highlight the methane capture and composting at the Mare Chicose landfill.

The U.S. Embassy has sponsored several brilliant Mauritians to participate in environmental exchange programs in the United States over the past few years. These Mauritians have gained valuable expertise to enable Mauritius to take effective action in areas from wildlife conservation to sustainable development. We welcome the work by Maurice Ile Durable to identify ways to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, reduce waste and pollution, and safeguard Mauritius' biodiversity.

I have been very impressed by the young people of Mauritius who recognize the challenges presented by climate change for their future. They will bear the consequences of environmental degradation and overconsumption of resources, so please talk with them and include them in policy discussions on climate change and sustainability.

Our individual efforts will also help mitigate the effects of climate change and build the resilience to prevent future disasters. Just look around. Call attention to the issue via your social media networks. Throw your trash in a bin. Mauritian young people who attended a seminar we sponsored last December were inspired to pick up litter at Le Pouce Mountain. For more ideas, you can go to our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/usembassy.mauritius), where we have posted photos from Mauritians illustrating their impressions of climate change. Today, Earth Day, my staff will join me in picking up trash and cleaning the area around our Embassy which saw some of the greatest flooding in Port Louis. Each of our small steps collectively can result in big changes.

On Earth Day and beyond, we should take the time to consider humanity's impact on the environment and examine how our own efforts, great or small, can make a difference. We look forward to working with all Mauritians to move forward together in the name of our planet Earth.

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