



**Embassy of the United States of America**  
*Port Louis, Mauritius*  
**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Women in Politics : Engage, Inspire and Persevere**

**Port Louis, March 20, 2013:** In commemoration of Women's History Month 2013, U.S. Embassy Port Louis hosted, on March 18, an event at the Municipal Council of Port Louis on the theme: Women in Politics: Engage, Inspire and Persevere. The event consisted of panels of newly elected municipal councilors, a representative from the Independent Commission against Corruption, a political activist and a member of the National Assembly. Two teleconferences were also set up with Mrs. Ekwe Ebongo, one of the winners of the 2011 U.S. Department of State Women of Courage Awards of Cameroon and Mrs. Rosun Marchio, a Mauritian settled in Italy and actively engaged in politics. These women shared their experiences, insights and lessons learnt on being effective political leaders.

This event was a way to celebrate the important role of women in Mauritius as they become more active in the political life of the country. *"We want you to succeed",* said Ambassador of the U.S., Shari Villarosa, addressing an audience of mainly women engaged in politics at various levels. Ambassador Villarosa reminded them that *"just two weeks ago, we marked, on March 8th, the 102nd observance of International Women's Day. The creation of International Women's Day emerged from the activities of labor movements at the turn of the 20th century in North America and across Europe. In its early years, the day honored the women's rights movement, advocated for the right to vote and hold public office, and for a ban on discrimination in the workplace. We have not yet succeeded, so we should reflect on the progress made, celebrate acts of courage and determination by women who have made a difference in their communities and countries, and continue to persevere".*

To that end, the U.S. Embassy has brought together a number of people from Mauritius and abroad. *"We hope they will inspire you. Women from different political parties, women with different ideas, and women from different areas have come together to listen and learn from each other."* The Ambassador added: *"The U.S. Embassy is proud of its role in promoting women's political participation and leadership in Mauritius. Democracy cannot flourish without the full participation of all its citizens. Women must be engaged in governance and policymaking. Not only because they have a right to be involved in the decisions that directly affect their lives and their communities, but also because their perspectives and experiences can improve the outcomes of these deliberations."*

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Last July, in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender Equality, the U.S. Embassy provided political training to women who were considering running for local government elections. Several of the participants did decide to run and were elected. Monday's event built on that training by bringing officials to share their experiences, insights, and lessons learned so as the participants to this half-day seminar can become effective leaders. *"Though we focus on women in politics today, women's participation is needed in all sectors. Women are already important drivers of economic growth, yet they still face barriers to economic participation and productivity, which undermines the economic progress of entire nations"*, pointed out U.S. Ambassador Shari Villarosa.

The panelists chosen for this event are women who engage, inspire, and persevere. Karen Foo Kune is a former high level badminton player. Ms. Foo Kune led team Mauritius in various international games and received several medals in the Indian Ocean Games as well as at African Championship games. She was elected in the 2012 elections to the Municipality of Beau-Bassin Rose Hill at her first participation in local government elections. Mrs. Rooma Meetoo, Mayor of Quatre Bornes, is a teacher by training, and a mother of three adult children. Her husband, Jaynarain Meetoo is a former Mayor and former Ambassador of Mauritius to France. Mrs. Paul Atchia is a political activist and feminist. A teacher by training, Mrs. Atchia has significantly contributed to education in Mauritius as well as the political empowerment of women by raising awareness on the lack of representation of women in decision making instances. Mrs. Kalyanee Juggoo is the newly appointed Secretary General of Mauritius Labor Party. Mrs. Juggoo strongly believes in public service and started by doing volunteer work and then moved on to active politics. A teacher by training, she held numerous post of responsibility, such as Deputy Chief Government Whip, Chairperson of ICAC, Parliamentary Private Secretary and now the first female Secretary General of the Mauritius Labor Party. Mrs. Nandita Sunechar, is the Assistant Director, Corruption Prevention and Education Division, of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). She joined the Commission in 2003, and previously worked for the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. At 24, barrister-at-law and accountant, Zareena Choomka, is one of the youngest municipal councilors.

These women talked about their experience, the challenges they have faced, be it the need to be able to financially sustain their campaign, or the fact that they could not be with their family as often as before. Nandita Sunechar talked about the responsibilities of elected political officials and the need to maintain public trust. *"Don't come and complain afterwards if you don't get in there (politics) now"*, said political activist Paula Atchia. The teleconference with Henriette Ekwe Ebongo from Cameroon, gave the insight of a journalist, publisher and political activist, living in a country of party dictatorship. Henriette Ekwe Ebongo never gave up despite all the difficult times she went through. Thirty years ago when she started politics, women were not allowed to be active in politics. She was arrested, she was tortured for weeks. She never gave up and was awarded the Department of State International Women of Courage in 2011. Henriette Ekwe Ebongo advocates freedom of press, gender equality, human rights, and good governance.

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