



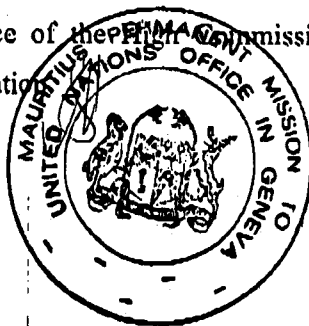
**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND
OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

**MISSION PERMANENTE DE LA REPUBLIQUE DE MAURICE AUPRES DES NATIONS UNIES
ET DES AUTRES ORGANISATIONS INTERNATIONALES**

No. 173/2012 (MMG/HR/28/3)

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Mauritius to the United Nations Office and other International Organisations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and with reference to its Note dated 5 April 2012 inviting submissions on housing finance institutions, policies and programmes elaborated by the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, has the honour to submit herewith the filled-in questionnaire and the relevant annexes.

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Mauritius to the United Nations Office and other International Organisations in Geneva avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration



Geneva, 22 June 2012

**Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva**

Fax: (022) 917 9008

OHCHR REGISTRY

22 JUN 2012

Recipients : SPD
.....
.....
.....

**QUESTIONNAIRE ON HOUSING FINANCING POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES
BY THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON ADEQUATE HOUSING AS A
COMPONENT OF THE RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING
AND ON THE RIGHT TO NON-DISCRIMINATION IN THIS CONTEXT.**

- 1. Is your country promoting housing finance policies or programmes aiming to enable access to home ownership and/or other affordable housing by the poorest segments of society, by providing credit through financial institutions (public, private or quasi private)?**

Yes.

If the answer is positive:

- a. Please indicate whether these policies or programmes involve public subsidies, tax exemptions or other public financing.**

These policies involve public subsidies, tax exemptions and other public financing.

- b. Please indicate whether these policies or programmes involve the participation of one or more of the following international finance institutions:**

- **International finance institutions (World Bank Group, International Monetary Fund, etc)**

No financing is received for the implementation of current housing policies or programmes.

- **Regional Development Banks (IDB, ADB (Asian), ADB (African), etc.)**

No financing is received for the implementation of current housing policies or programmes.

- **International private financial actors (commercial banks, investment funds, etc.)**

No financing is received for the implementation of current housing policies or programmes.

- c. Please indicate the period of time during which these policies and programmes have been implemented.**

Housing finance policies have been created, updated and improved at various periods, as highlighted in the chronological answer to Question 3.

- d. Please indicate whether these programmes have been developed or implemented as part of recovery measures in the context of the global financial and economic crises that started in 2008.**

While some policies have been set up well before 2008, several others have been introduced in 2011 predominantly to provide the poorest segments of the Mauritian Society with tools to face difficult times brought by the global financial and economic crises of 2008, as more fully described in the answer to Question 3.

- 2. Please provide any available assessment of the impact of such policies and programmes on the housing situation of the poor or other categories of beneficiaries.**

Government intervention in the social housing sector has contributed to the construction of some 92500 houses which account for about 26% of housing stock in Mauritius.

While a synopsis is provided below, assessments of the impact of specific policies and programmes on the housing situation are more detailed in the answer to Question 3.

Specially provide the following data:

- a. The percentage of the population living in informal settlements before and after the implementation of these policies.**

Year	Number of Households	Informal settlements*	
		Number	%
2000	297900	3200	1
2011	341000	500	0.15

* Non regularized Post July 2001 squatters.

- b. The percentage of households with access to improved sanitation (including in rural areas) before and after the implementation of these policies.**

Sanitation		%	
		2000	2011
Piped Water	Inside the house	83.7	94.2
	Outside premises	14.5	5.2
Toilet	Flush toilet	88.8	96.4
	Pit latrines	11.0	3.4

- c. The percentage of population with access to electricity (including in rural areas) before and after the implementation of these policies.

Electricity	%	
	2000	2011
	99.0	99.4

- d. The percentage of houses with ownership or clear title on their dwelling before and after the implementation of these policies.

Tenure	Number		%	
	2000	2011	2000	2011
Owner	257700	303200	86.5	88.9

3. Please also provide information on programmes or policies concerning construction or provision of public housing for sale or rental in the country (including privatization of public housing). Please describe any significant reforms or developments in this sector over the last thirty years. Please provide (in annex) any relevant documents, laws, regulations or policies.

The current direction of the Housing Policy is to

- (i) facilitate access to a variety of affordable housing to cater for the different and evolving needs of present and future generations,
- (ii) strengthen social and cultural integration through the provision of appropriate social and recreational facilities in social housing development, and
- (iii) create mixed housing development schemes to help inclusion and equality among the low income groups.

In line with the Housing Policy, the objectives of the National Housing Programme for the next ten years are for Government to provide access for housing to the low, lower middle and middle income groups through the construction and sale of 9000 housing units on State Land, the

creation of 24000 serviced lots (provided with roads, water, electricity, drainage etc) over State Land for lease as building sites, in addition to financial assistance.

The programme for the housing units targets two categories of the low income group as follows:

- Scheme 1: Housing units of 39m² for earners of less than Rs 10,000 as monthly income;
- Scheme 2: Housing units of 57m² for monthly income earners between Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000.

The programme for serviced lots target two categories of the lower middle income group as follows:

- Scheme 3: Serviced lots for monthly income earners between Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000;
- Scheme 4: Serviced lots for monthly income earners between Rs 20,000 to Rs 25,000.

A fifth scheme is in the form of financial assistance by way of Government sponsored loans which are available to middle income earners with income ranging between Rs 25,000 to Rs 50,000.

Significant reforms or developments in this sector over the last thirty years

- a. Government intervention in social housing in Mauritius dates as far as 1955, with the construction of the first housing estates comprising 1000 houses and the creation of the Ministry of Housing and Lands, responsible for matters relating to social housing management, in addition to, some years later, the setting up of a Central Housing Authority (CHA) for the construction of some 19300 low cost houses. These houses, and the land on which they had been built, were leased to the tenants by the CHA.
- b. In 1989, Government introduced the "Right to Buy" policy for beneficiaries of CHA houses to become owner of their housing unit, against payment of around Rs 500-1000 per unit.
- c. In 1991, the CHA was replaced by another executive arm of the Government as implementation agency for social housing construction, the National Housing Development Company

(NHDC). Some 12,000 houses have been constructed by the NHDC to date. Existing social housing units are currently sold to people earning up to Rs 12,000 monthly.

- d. The Mauritius Housing Corporation (MHC) was also set up in 1991 as a financial institution to deal with housing finance through Government Sponsored Loans. Government grants loans amounting to Rs 325,000 at an interest rate as low as 6.5% to low income families earning up to Rs 8,500, and interest rates of 10% to 12% to low income families earning between Rs 8,500 and Rs. 10,000 to acquire a social housing unit.
- e. From 1997 onwards, a new policy direction was adopted, with more emphasis on self-help and financial assistance, via the introduction of a grant scheme for the casting of roof slabs and the purchase of building materials.
 - o casting of roof slabs: Government grants up to Rs 65 000 as a one-off cash grant for the casting of roof slab of up to 100m² either to the first time house owner earning up to Rs 8 500 monthly or for a second housing unit to another member of the same family.
 - o purchase of building materials: Government grants up to Rs 55 000 to households who own a plot of land, earn up to Rs 5000 monthly and cannot afford to start constructing their own house.

Some 44,000 families have benefited from that self-help and financial assistance scheme.

- f. In 2000, the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups (TFSIVG) was created and helped 3500 poor families who could neither buy the cheapest Government-funded social housing units nor construct a house on their own land.
- g. In 2001, over and above the existing policy of granting building site leases to low income earners of less than Rs 3000 monthly, Government introduced the "sites and services" scheme, which is a sixty year lease over serviced lots (provided with roads, water, electricity, drainage etc) targeting income earners between Rs 8500 to Rs 16,000. The scheme has been amended in 2011 to ranges from Rs 15,000 to Rs 25000. As at date, some 13500 building site leases have been granted by the Ministry of Housing and Lands, including "sites and services".

- h. In 2004, a policy was introduced towards regularizing pre-July 2001 residential squatters by the grant of building site leases by Government. Some 2700 squatters have been regularized. The TFSIVG erected wooden and cis structures for free for some regularized squatters over State land granted on lease to them.
- i. In 2005, a National Empowerment Foundation (NEF) was set up with a more integrated approach to improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable groups inclusive of housing as well as training, education, life skills and placement for employment.
- j. The "Right to Buy" policy introduced in 1989 regarding CHA house ownership was extended in 2007 to the State land on which stood the CHA houses, against payment of a nominal amount of Rs.2000 to Government. Some 8800 families have become full owners of their land under that scheme. The State Land Act was amended to facilitate the implementation of that scheme - a copy of the amended Act is at Annex 1.
- k. In 2010, Government has created the Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment (MSIEE) to head the TFSIVG and the NEF created in 2000 and 2005 respectively.
- l. In its budget speech for 2011, Government came up with a Housing with Good Living programme over the next ten years that includes 5 Schemes for families earning income ranging from Rs5000 to Rs 50,000 - an extract regarding the aforesaid housing measures is at Annex 2.
- m. In its budget speech for 2012 - an extract regarding housing measures is at Annex 3 -, Government announced several housing programmes as follows:
- i. a National Housing Programme to cater for the needs of a variety of household ranging from the low to the middle income groups, through a mix housing development comprising houses, serviced lots, social amenities and recreational facilities. An amount of Rs1.5 billion has been committed to the Social Housing Development Fund. The Programme would comprise construction of concrete houses,

concrete under CIS houses, emergency CIS housing units, a shelter for homeless people.

- ii. Families earning less than Rs 10,000 monthly, considered as the poorest of the society, would settle only one third of the costs when acquiring a Government funded social housing unit. Another one third of the costs would be subsidized by Government, in addition to the provision of offsite infrastructure. The remaining one third of the costs would be borne by not-for-profit Housing Development Trusts.
- iii. To improve the living conditions of families within 41 existing high rise NHDC housing estates, and provide them with a clean, safe and healthy living environment, the Government also contributes 2,400 rupees per year for each of some 6179 families, to set up a syndic to ensure coordination, discipline, and maintain common areas in a clean and orderly state. The residents appoint their own syndic and supplement Government's contribution.
- iv. Government has also waived the payment of 2,000 rupees representing the cost of the land for some 2,000 families in ex - CHA housing estates who cannot benefit from the facility given to them for the purchase of state land, on which their houses stand.
- v. To assist middle-income earners, land transfer tax is not applicable for the years 2012-2013 on the construction of housing estates comprising at least 5 units, at a maximum price of 2.5 million rupees each. First-time buyers are fully exempted from registration duty when purchasing a home under that scheme.
- vi. Social housing projects by Housing Development Trusts are not subject to Value Added Tax (VAT), and are also exempted from land conversion tax, registration duties and land transfer tax.
- vii. The 'sites and services' scheme launched in 2001 has also been amended in 2011 to target beneficiaries with income ranging from Rs 15,000 to Rs 25000.

23 May 2012

LEGAL SUPPLEMENT

61

to the Government Gazette of Mauritius No. 33 of 7 April 2007

THE STATE LANDS (AMENDMENT) ACT 2007

Act No. 4 of 2007

Jassent

SIR ANEROOD JUGNAUTH

President of the Republic

4th April 2007

ARRANGEMENT OF SECTIONS

Section

- 1. Short title
- 2. Interpretation
- 3. Section 5 of principal Act amended

An Act

To amend the State Lands Act so as to permit the sale by private contract of those portions of State Land on which ex-CHA Housing Estates have been built

ENACTED by the Parliament of Mauritius, as follows -

1. Short title

This Act may be cited as the State Lands (Amendment) Act 2007.

2. Interpretation

In this Act -

"principal Act" means the State Lands Act.

3. Section 5 of principal Act amended

Section 5 of the principal Act is amended by adding after subsection (2), the following new subsection -

(3) Notwithstanding the other provisions of this Act, where the owner of a house standing on a portion of State Land, which was built as part of a Housing Estate commonly known as an ex-CHA Housing Estate, is willing to buy the portion of land, the Minister may sell it to him by private contract at the price of 2000 rupees.

Passed by the National Assembly on the twenty seventh day of March two thousand and seven.

Ram Ranjit Dowlutta
Clerk of the National Assembly

**REBALANCING GROWTH
CONSOLIDATING SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Mr Speaker, Sir,

I move that the Appropriation Bill 2011 be read a second time.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

2. This Budget appropriates funds for the year 2011. It has been prepared after wide consultations with various organizations and people from all walks of life. I wish to thank them all for their valuable contributions. They have expressed their views, their concerns and their expectations and made some valuable suggestions. We have done the maximum we can so that this Budget reflects their hopes.

3. Mr Speaker, Sir, I took office as Minister of Finance and Economic Development in the midst of the euro-zone crisis - an external shock which has a more direct and menacing impact on our export sectors than the Great Recession. At the same time, Brazil, Russia, India, China (BRIC) and some other emerging economies were gaining greater prominence as contributors to global output, thus rebalancing the world economy.

4. While the euro-zone crisis revealed the need to reduce our economy's heavy dependence on Europe, the new global economic architecture was offering us good opportunities to do so. We therefore responded decisively to these two events. We formulated an Economic Restructuring and Competitiveness Program (ERCP) that included a far-reaching micro-economic agenda. This was immediately followed by active implementation.

to recruit, according to the sector, between 1 and 3 NEF beneficiaries. The NEF will subsidise the training costs and the stipend, with a larger payment for middle-aged women. To ensure that these enterprises remain competitive, we will also facilitate the application and approval process for work permits by making it rules based and time bound.

341. All companies having been granted a quota of at least 25 foreign workers would be required to participate.

342. To support our ambitious social agenda, the Ministry of Social Integration will benefit from over Rs 1.2 billion in 2011 and oversee the three national programmes to be co-financed with CSR contributions. This represents an almost three-fold increase compared to the Rs 450 million spent on empowerment in 2010.

343. For 2011, Rs 400 million are earmarked for some 700 housing units for families earning less than Rs 5,000 per month. To ensure the welfare of some 10,000 children from vulnerable groups, Rs 100 million is being provided. We are pursuing efforts to Eradicate Absolute Poverty by mobilizing Rs 240 million to serve 7,000 citizens. In addition, Rs 500 million is available to enable the NEF to continue its efforts, aimed at some 8,000 citizens, for Training and Placement, Micro-enterprises for Women, Projects in Rodrigues, Emergency Housing and the Decentralised Cooperation Programme to build the capacity of Civil Society Organisations to participate in the national empowerment effort.

Housing With Good Living: A Plan To Face Down The Housing Problem

344. Housing is the area where we can make the deepest inroads in eradicating absolute poverty and improving the living standards of families

with modest income. Notwithstanding the estimated 87 percent home ownership in Mauritius, too many poor and lower income families live in overcrowded units. For many of these families, their efforts to own a home are frustrated by the affordability factor. This is also becoming a problem for first-time middle class home buyers.

345. We are therefore implementing a comprehensive Housing With Good Living programme over the next ten years that includes 5 Schemes.

- Scheme 1 is for families with monthly income not exceeding Rs 5,000.
- Scheme 2 - for families earning monthly income between Rs 5,000 and Rs 10,000.
- Scheme 3 - for families earning monthly income between Rs 10,000 and Rs 15,000.
- Scheme 4 - for families with monthly income between Rs 15,000 and Rs 25,000.
- And Scheme 5 is for families with monthly income between Rs 25,000 and Rs 50,000.

346. Out of the 2,000 arpents of land that were successfully negotiated by the Prime Minister, 1,000 arpents will be used for our housing programme. This will enable the construction of about one third of the 40,000 houses, on a mixed basis, over the next ten years.

347. Purchasers under Scheme 1 will have to sign the social contract with the NEF.

348. The mortgage repayments for all 5 schemes will be worked out over a long period of up to 40 years to ensure affordability. We want to leave enough income in the hands of the families after mortgage repayments to cater for other basic needs. The mortgage will cover the price of the house and associated fees.

349. All housing units will be equipped with water tanks and where practical solar water heaters.

350. The units will be constructed following the principles of green building.

351. Thus, under Scheme 1, which is in the category of social housing for the absolute poor:

- Some 7,000 units will be constructed.
- Government will provide an outright grant from CSR money.
- Government will also bear the full cost of land and fifty percent of the on-site infrastructure cost.
- No initial deposit will be required on the purchase price.
- And the monthly repayments as a ratio of income will start in the first year at 20 percent and rise with the income of the family to a maximum of 30 percent.

352. Under Scheme 2 the purchasers will have the same benefits as under Scheme 1, except that because their income is higher they will be required to pay an initial deposit of 10 percent of the price. Some 1,700 units will be constructed under that scheme.

353. Under Scheme 3:

- Some 9,000 serviced plots will be provided for the construction of houses over the next ten years.
- Government will bear the cost of land and off-site infrastructure.
- A mortgage will be provided by MHC.
- A deposit of 10 percent of the value of the property will be required.
- And the monthly repayments as a ratio of income should not exceed 30 percent in the first year, rising to a maximum of 40 percent with the income of the family.

354. Under Scheme 4:

- Some 15,000 serviced plots will be provided over the next ten years.
- Government will bear half the cost of land but the beneficiary will pay for the cost of servicing the plot.
- A mortgage will be provided by commercial banks with a guarantee operated by MHC.
- A deposit of 15 percent of the value of the property will be required.
- And the monthly repayments as a ratio of income should work out to be 35 percent or less and rise with the income of the family to a maximum of 40 percent.

355. Under Scheme 5:

- Government will support some 6,500 first-time buyers to purchase or build a house that costs up to 50 percent more than they can afford with their current income.

- This will be made possible through a guarantee to commercial banks, operated by MHC.
- The monthly repayments should not exceed 40 percent of family income.

356. Mr Speaker, Sir, the total contribution of Government to support the 40,000 families who will benefit from these five schemes amount to Rs 18.5 billion of which Rs 2 billion from CSR money.

357. We are giving further support.

358. An adult first-time buyer of a house or bare residential land will not have to bear registration duty if his total annual income is below Rs 2 million. This benefit will apply on the first Rs 1.5 million of the price of a house, or the first Rs 750,000 of the price of bare land provided the beneficiary begins construction within one year and completes within three.

359. We are increasing the grant for casting of slabs from Rs 60,000 to Rs 65,000.

360. And we are maintaining all other schemes and giving families looking for a house a choice between the existing and new schemes.

OUR ELDERS

361. Mr Speaker, Sir, all our elders deserve to live in dignity. The wealth we are creating today, the prosperity we are enjoying also bear the indelible footprints of their hard work. They must get their fair share.

362. We are constructing a Recreation Centre in the north at Pointe aux Piments.

BUDGET 2012

GROWTH FOR THE GREATER GOOD

Mr Speaker, Sir,

I move that the Appropriation Bill 2012 be read a second time.

2. Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a great honour for me to present the seventh budget of the two consecutive mandates of this Government.

3. In 2005, this Government inherited, in the words of the previous Prime Minister, an 'Économie en état d'urgence'. And since then, Mauritius has had to deal with one external shock after another. This included the worst food price inflation and biggest surge in oil prices in decades, the worst financial turmoil in a hundred years, the worst economic crisis Europe has seen in a very long time, and now the relapse of global economic recovery.

4. It has been six years of assorted adversities.

5. But under the strong and effective leadership of the Prime Minister, supported by a committed cabinet, our country has weathered every storm.

6. These adverse global events have left many countries counting their misfortunes. But Mauritius has withstood all the shocks.

7. Since 2006, we have:

- created 9,400 jobs annually, compared to just 4,500 annually in the preceding 5 years;
- increased net international reserves to around 40 weeks of import cover;
- set out one of the simplest tax return systems in the world;
- made Mauritius one of the lowest income tax economies in the world;
- broadened the economic base with new sectors; and
- begun the democratisation of the economy.

249. I am pleased to announce that for all those earning up to 3,000 rupees a month, Government will now pay their share of the contribution to the National Pension Fund as well as pay their share of the Transitional Unemployment Benefit.

250. This effectively adds another 4 percent to their remuneration. On a salary of 3,000 rupees it amounts to 120 rupees per month which we will pay on their behalf into their NPF and TUB accounts. This will provide more pension for them in the future and is in addition to the hefty increase of 330 rupees granted during the salary compensation exercise.

251. Furthermore, the Mauritius Revenue Authority (MRA) will adapt its annual income tax return to enable registration of the employee and payment of the annual NPF contribution in one go by employers, without additional interest or penalty.

252. MRA will issue an annual income statement to each employee.

253. We will also professionalise housekeeping work. To this end the National Empowerment Fund (NEF) in collaboration with NGOs, will train some 500 domestic workers next year, and provide them with a certificate.

Decent Housing Units for Every Family

254. Mr Speaker, Sir, another most conspicuous manifestation of poverty in our country is the number of people who live in poor housing conditions - men, women, children and the elderly.

255. Many of the housing estates are fast becoming no man's land. There is a lack of regulation and discipline, poor sanitary facilities, poor water reticulation and wastewater disposal systems, to name but a few. Common areas are often in a state of dilapidation.

256. If we do not act now, we can imagine what the living conditions for these families will be like in the future. And this is not where we want to take our country and our society.

257. What these families need, is a clean, safe and healthy living environment.

258. For these families too, we are today taking meaningful action that will make a big difference to their life.

259. We are committing the necessary resources in 2012 to ensure that all the 44 NHDC housing estates have a functional syndic. Currently only 9 of them do.

260. For 2012 Government will contribute 200 rupees per housing unit, per month, that is 2,400 rupees per year per housing unit, to set up a syndic in all NHDC estates, except for the three middle-income ones. The residents will appoint their own syndic and will be encouraged to supplement Government's contribution. The main role of the syndic will be to ensure coordination, discipline, and maintain common areas in a clean and orderly state.

261. This will considerably improve the daily life of some 6,150 families.

262. In addition, we are committing resources to:

- rehabilitate the wastewater disposal system of housing estates;
- *rehabilitate water supply* on 15 NHDC estates; and
- carry out waterproofing works in housing estates at Rose Belle and Palma.

263. Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is also giving a major boost to the construction of more housing units. We will do so with an innovative new vehicle that will mobilise substantial amounts of financing for housing development.

We will encourage the setting up of not-for-profit Housing Development Trusts.

264. The main features of this new scheme are as follows:

- The Trusts will mobilise resources from the CSR fund of companies to meet one third of the costs.
- Government will bear another one third of the costs and will provide for the offsite infrastructure, if the project is within an agreed distance from existing infrastructure.
- Any land may be contributed for construction by these Trusts, as would any land acquired under the Prime Minister's deal with the sugar sector.
- Preference will be given to smaller sites that promote social inclusion.

- To lower costs to purchasers, the social housing projects of these Trusts will not be subject to VAT.
- They will also be exempted from the payment of land conversion tax, registration duty and land transfer tax.
- And the Trusts will be responsible for on-going management of the estates.

265. Mr Speaker, Sir, we can build houses. But it serves no purpose if they are not affordable to low-income families. We know that most of these families would find it impossible to make ends meet if they have to pay the full price. We want to give them maximum assistance.

266. Families earning less than 10,000 rupees will thus pay only the final third of the cost. This means that, for example, for a house that costs around 900,000 rupees, a family will pay only 300,000 rupees.

267. This benefit will only go to families who will agree to enter into a comprehensive social contract covering civic responsibilities, employability, education of children and family values.

268. To kick start this project, SLDC will provide 4 arpents of land at Dagotière for the construction of 50 units.

269. Mr Speaker, Sir, in addition the NHDC has identified 160 arpents under the Prime Minister's deal with the sugar industry. This will enable the NHDC to accelerate its own programme to construct 1,000 units.

270. For low income families, earning less than 10,000 rupees per month, the same conditions will apply as for the Housing Development Trusts.

271. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to announce that we are now committing 1.5 billion rupees to the Social Housing Development Fund.

272. Furthermore, NEF will expand its scheme for concrete cum CIS houses, constructed on beneficiaries' own land, to 600 units including 400 in Rodrigues.

273. And emergency housing under the CIS scheme will add another 600 units.

274. In our housing policy, we are not forgetting the Sans Domicile Fixe. For them, NEF will create a shelter at Abattoir Road, Port Louis.

275. Mr Speaker, Sir, to assist middle-income earners, and give a further spur to construction, we are removing land transfer tax for the next two years on the construction of housing estates comprising at least 5 units, at a maximum price of 2.5 million rupees each.

276. First-time buyers will be fully exempted from registration duty when purchasing a home under that scheme.

277. Finally, there are some 2,000 families in ex-CHA housing estates who cannot benefit from the facility given to them for the purchase of state land, on which their houses stand, because they simply do not have the means. Mr Speaker, Sir, these lands will now be granted free of charge. Government will waive payment of 2,000 rupees representing the cost of the land.

Health is Wealth

278. Mr Speaker, Sir, I will now elaborate on our policies on health care.

279. Health is wealth. Health is also happiness.

280. That is why we will deepen our commitment to take our country to a modern, cutting edge health care system.

281. Our very first action will be for patients who need to go overseas for treatment but cannot meet the costs. To be sick is already distressing. Not to be able to afford the treatment is a personal tragedy.

282. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am therefore more than doubling the maximum grant under the Overseas Treatment Scheme from 200,000 rupees to 500,000 rupees. The air ticket for one person accompanying the patient will be on the same conditions as before but will be delivered by the Ministry of Health as a one-stop service.

283. In that same spirit of relieving people of their pains and tribulations, we are increasing the amount allocated to the rehabilitation of alcoholics and drug addicts by 70 percent to 51 million rupees. This will reinforce our capacity to combat drug abuse, alcoholism and addiction to tobacco. As we spend more on cure and rehabilitation, we also need to take action to eliminate the abuse of alcohol and tobacco smoking.

284. To that end, we are increasing excise duty rates as follows: