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THE INTERNATIONAL INDENTURED LABOUR ROUTE PROJECT

Information Paper submitted by Mauritius

Background

Ignorance or concealment of major historical events constitutes an obstacle to mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation among peoples. The International Labour Route Project centred around Aapravasi Ghat in Mauritius symbolizes the story of more than 462,000 indentured labour, the vast majority from India, who were recruited to work on the sugar plantations in Mauritius, after the abolition of slavery. Subsequently, Aapravasi Ghat became one of the oldest surviving entry and transit points associated with indenture. More than 2.2 million indentured labour were mobilized mostly from India to more than 26 countries in various parts of the world making it one of the greatest mass movements of the diaspora worldwide. The International Indentured Labour Route Project will complement the Slave Route Project since both relate to the movement of a mass of people across continents. These movements based on intercultural exchanges have been instrumental in forging most of the modern societies of today. This process of indentured labour deserves to be studied in a more systematic, scientific and global manner. Ignorance of such major historical events constitutes a barrier to mutual understanding and cooperation among peoples.

This project will *inter alia*:

- contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of the movement of millions of peoples and cultures in that age;
- highlight the global transformations and culture interactions that has resulted from this history; and
- contribute to a culture of peace by promoting reflection on culture pluralism, intercultural dialogue, sustainable development and peace.

International scope of the Project

A secretariat of the International Indentured Labour Route Project will be established. The Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund (AGTF) in Mauritius under the aegis of the Ministry of Arts and Culture will conduct several major internal activities such as:

- conducting research and documenting the indentured experience in Mauritius and in other countries where the system existed; and
- setting up national and international links with other countries.

The project would develop a broad spectrum of activities relevant to various fields of UNESCO's mandate and activities including the following:

- development of research on unknown aspects of this history;
- promotion of intangible, cultural and artistic expressions across continents until today;
- preservation and promotion of important sites and places of memory; and
- preservation of written archives and oral traditions.

Thus, the project would be a catalyst for cooperation in the field of development, research, intercultural education and the deconstruction against racism, promotion of cultural expressions and heritage material born out of this history and would have a lasting impact.

It is clear that the aim of the Indentured Labour Route Project will be to bring together all countries having experienced the migration of contractual labour in the nineteenth century when the world

economic order was being transformed in the manner we know it today. It will strive to contribute to nation-building efforts and to a greater understanding among peoples and societies across the indentured diaspora as well as within the countries themselves.

The project would also give indentured labour and their descendants a voice in the international community without any mediators. The indentured and their descendants need to have the opportunity to present their version of their experience. In other words, it is important to look for the indentured thought and experience as seen, felt and witnessed by the immigrants and their descendants, rather than through the tinted cultural lenses of others.

The expected outputs of the Indentured Labour Route Project which are of great importance to the international community are to:

- encourage the development of research and the setting up of a documentation centre and database on the indentured labour migration across the world;
- create a network of persons and institutions who will collaborate, share and disseminate knowledge about the indentured system, the history and culture of its descendants;
- locate and preserve cultural heritage sites relating to indenture and place them on the Indenture Route in view of a serial nomination of indentured sites ;
- lead to the publication of works in the form of DVDs, CD-ROMs, books, etc., on indenture as an international phenomenon;
- organize annually seminars, conferences, artistic and cultural events in various countries of indenture to increase awareness of the indentured experience in all its multiple variations.

It is clear that Mauritius as the first and largest recipient of indentured labour in the nineteenth century and being the country with the largest proportion of descendants of indentured labour today is ideally suited to lead the project. Mauritius, as initiator of the project and as the only country hosting a world heritage site linked to indentured labour (Aapravasi Ghat), would host the secretariat of the project at the AGTF under the aegis of UNESCO and would link the project with other Member States on the Indentured Route.

Among activities planned in the context of the commemoration of the 180th anniversary of the arrival of indentured labour in Mauritius, an international conference/workshop is being hosted by the Ministry of Arts and Culture, Mauritius, from 3 to 5 November 2014 in collaboration with the AGTF on the theme of the project. Its objective is to help to sensitize the international community regarding implications of mass movement of populations as witnessed in the international labour route. This has implications for 26 countries on the route.

Development of an international database on Indentured Labour

As suggested by the World Heritage Committee in its Decision 30 COM 8B.33, one of the objectives of the project is to constitute a corpus of professionals in various fields such as history, anthropology, archaeology, heritage, etc. in order to elaborate an international database on indentured labour accessible worldwide which would disseminate information about such a major historical event and build a greater understanding and cooperation among peoples.

This database will, *inter alia*:

- give access to digital copies of archival documents on indentured labour;
- provide access to a bibliography and articles of scholars on indentured labour;

- create a photograph library on indentured labour; and
- allow for the creation of a catalogue on heritage sites related to indenture.

The database will be accessible through a website which will highlight, among others the following:

- latest news/research on indentured labour;
- interaction between scholars and those interested in indentured labour; and
- information on indentured labour worldwide with a general overview for each country.

This project will play a significant role in securing international recognition of the role played by indentured labour which has shaped modern societies. This is important because indentured labour is under-researched and hardly known as part of colonial history. The project aims to unite and connect people, to foster research on indenture, disseminate information on indentured labour as an international phenomenon and to set up collaborative programmes that will promote the history of indentured labour worldwide.

Role of Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund in supporting the establishment of an International Indentured Labour Route Project

Ever since 2004, Mauritius through the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund and the Ministry of Arts and Culture has actively proposed the setting up of an Indentured Labour Route Project. In December 2011, AGTF with the collaboration of the Ministry of Arts and Culture held a three-day International Indentured Labour conference. There was a total of more than 40 participants with 15 overseas scholars from more than 12 countries representing the indentured labour diaspora and an amount of Rs.1.5 million (MRU) or US \$50,000 was spent. This conference called for the creation of an international committee for the elaboration of an international database of indentured migration. Mauritius, Trinidad and Surinamese representatives would work together and propose within one year a proposal for an international database.

The following resolutions were adopted concerning the establishment of the **International Indentured Labour Route Project (IILRP)** and the **Indentured Labour Global Database Initiative (ILGDI)**

The participants of the International Conference entitled “New Perspectives on Indentured Labour (1825-1925)”, in the presence of the Honourable Mookhesswur Choonee, Mauritian Minister of Arts and Culture, agreed unanimously that the following recommendations be implemented:

1. Calling upon the Government of Mauritius, specifically the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund and the Ministry of Arts and Culture, to set up an international network of scholars and institutions to support the implementation of the International Indentured Labour Route Project (IILRP) with a view to develop the Indentured Labour Global Database Initiative (ILGDI).
2. Establishment of a permanent secretariat for this network in Mauritius at the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund which will also ensure the successful implementation and expansion of the IILRP. This secretariat will also be responsible for the setting up of a website and publication of quarterly newsletters.

Financial and budgetary implications

Mauritius has conducted consultations with Member States especially those associated with the indentured labour, Indian diaspora countries and international organizations. These Member States

have shown keen interest and support to the project and India has confirmed its full support and assistance. Voluntary contributions would be welcome.

For the years 2014 to 2016, the project is estimated to cost \$486,400. A breakdown of the cost is presented in the annex to this document.

For the year 2014, a first international conference on the subject has already been planned by Mauritius and will be held from 3 to 5 November. The Government of Mauritius has already earmarked an amount of \$83,500 as a support to the project.

For the years 2015 and 2016 the Government of Mauritius will fund a total amount of \$256,700 as detailed in the annex. The remaining amount of \$146,560 will be sought from countries which have agreed, in principle, to contribute, and from international organizations.

ANNEX

INTERNATIONAL INDENTURED LABOUR ROUTE PROJECT BUDGET

TABLE I

Year	MUR	US\$	Funded by Government of Mauritius		BALANCE (US\$)
2014	2,500,000	83,500	MUR 2,500,000	US \$83,500	NIL
2015	5,705,000	190,200	MUR 3,845,000	US \$128,170	62,030
2016	6,380,000	212,700	MUR 3,845,000	US \$128,170	84,530
TOTAL	14,585,000	486,400	MUR 10,190,000	US \$339,670	146,560

TABLE II

BREAKDOWN OF BUDGET

Items	2014 MUR	2015 MUR	2016 MUR
Creation of a website and database	-	300,000	-
Expenses for participants	1,600,000	202,500	202,500
Rental of venue	<u>Gratis</u> To be provided by the Secretariat (Mauritius)	<u>Gratis</u> To be provided by the Secretariat (Mauritius)	<u>Gratis</u> To be provided by the Secretariat (Mauritius)
Rental of equipment (audio visual, computer, etc.)			
Food and beverage	297,000	297,000	297,000
Stationery, kits for delegates and local transport	300,000	300,000	300,000
Per diem (where applicable)/Contingency	303,000	500,000	500,000
Secretariat	NIL	4,105,500	5,080,500
Total Expenses	2,500,000	MUR 5,705,000	6,380,000