

**Opening Address  
Chronic Diseases Management Conference  
PAS, Francis Plain  
23 January 2020**

“It is my pleasure to meet once again this week the WHO representative Dr Laurent Musango and the delegation from the Ministry of Health and Wellbeing in Mauritius led by Dr Bhooshun Ori.

This workshop today represents the central reason for the evolving collaboration between St Helena and Mauritius. Namely, addressing the scourge of non-communicable diseases – which in layman’s terms I summarise as diseases such as cardiovascular, diabetes, cancerous and respiratory in nature.

Insidiously and debilitatingly they are increasingly affecting more of our Islanders and significantly they are increasing the physical and financial burden on our people and health service. The diagnosis of doctors, if that is the correct collective noun, here in the room today will be intimately aware of the breadth of cases and damage being caused by these largely preventable diseases.

Statistics on non-communicable disease abound in the literature. So, I picked just two to illustrate the magnitude of this unwanted ‘epidemic’. Back in 2013 the WHO reported worldwide that non-communicable diseases represented 63% of all disease burden. I feel sure that percentage would have risen higher since then. Just this week a US article projected a headline that non-communicable diseases over the next two decades with cost health systems and economies around the world a staggering \$47 trillion.

Here at home it is recognised we have a rising tide of demand from non-communicable diseases and clearly much to do to turn it back. When it comes to non-communicable diseases we need to realise the health of our Island is deteriorating. For many, but not all, this is self-inflicted, which those once inflicted, then seek our doctors and nurses to cure the infliction. On an island where healthcare is currently funded by the central government budget and where secondary care in South Africa is effectively undertaken at a private medical facility, the burden is becoming intolerable.

Collectively, we still have much to do to change public behaviours that encourage inactivity, tolerate the disastrous consequences of smoking and excessive drinking, and persuade people to adopt healthier diets.

But, there is destination ahead for you, your family and our health services to aim for. Mauritius in the field of non-communicable diseases is recognised as a success story. With a past history of rising disease occurrence their health sector has confronted this, and over time and through sustained and determined practices involving the general public, they have turned the tide of non-communicable disease. Overall, their rates of new non-communicable disease have been falling.

Now is exactly the right time for this workshop. St Helena is eager to learn about this success and:

- The approaches used to change public behaviours
- The policies that successfully changed food choices and eating habits
- The education that embedded a different frame of mind about one's health and habits; and
- The training of professionals across the public sector and beyond that was needed to achieve an eventual health improvement.

By the end of your visit I hope the forms of possible collaboration with health professionals in Mauritius and the World Health Organisation will become clearer. And, in the coming months and years they will blossom and develop into a closer bond between our two islands.

Thank you.

**Governor Dr Philip Rushbrook**  
**St Helena, Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha**  
**23 January 2020**