

## **Welcome Remarks by Mr Rundheersing Bheenick, Governor, Bank of Mauritius, at the Gala Dinner hosted on the occasion of the 11<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Islamic Financial Services Board, Balaclava, 21 May 2014**

My pleasant task this evening is to welcome you all to this splendid Gala Dinner. I am pleased to see you are relaxing and enjoying yourselves after long hours confined within four walls.

You have tonight been invited at the Ruins of Balaclava. The spectacle is quite different from the sandy beach and turquoise waters you have seen today. We are taking you back in history this evening. Over three centuries ago! Tonight will hopefully give you some added perspective on Mauritius.

In front of you is Turtle Bay. Why Turtle Bay? There was a large tortoise population in the waters of Mauritius. It did not take long for these charming tortoises to be depleted - so popular was their meat and oil from their liver. Rest assured, ladies and gentlemen, tortoise is not on the menu tonight!

In the 1700's, one of the illustrious Governors, Mahé de Labourdonnais, ordered the construction of a fortress just a few metres away from Turtle Bay. And our background this evening is what remains of the fortress. It is said that the name "Balaclava" might just strike a bell with those who are familiar with the history of Eastern Europe. Indeed, our Speaker tonight from Istanbul might link Balaclava and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Crimean history. The link is through one Sir Charles Staveley, a soldier in the time of Queen Victoria, who was remarkably the first female Head of State of Mauritius, whose rather stern statue you can still see in front of Government House in Place d'Armes in Port Louis, today our Street of High Finance where banks are proud to set up their headquarters. Staveley was *aide-de-camp* to the one-time Governor of Mauritius and he served with the British army in the Crimean war. Colonel Staveley was engaged in the notorious Battle of Balaclava with its infamous suicidal Charge of the Light Brigade so poignantly rendered by the poet Tennyson. This is where, some say, that the name "Balaclava" comes from.

After this brief incursion into history, poetry, and the reference to our first female Head of State, let us come back to the present moment. I have the immense pleasure of welcoming in our midst this evening our present Head of State, His Excellency Mr Rajkeswur Purryag, the President of the Republic of Mauritius. President Purryag's record of public service over four decades, culminating with the highest office of the land, and his many achievements are a source of great pride for Mauritian people. When I called on the President with the invitation to be our Chief Guest this evening, he told me that he had a pressing engagement with the Honourable Prime Minister and the judiciary. However, he added that he would make it a point to be with us to re-affirm by his presence the commitment of the country to the development of Islamic Finance. I am therefore, very thankful to you, Your Excellency, for accepting this invitation and be with us tonight.

I wish you an enjoyable evening with us.

Bon appétit Ladies and Gentlemen.