



GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE – MAY 2021

COUNTRY REPORT – REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

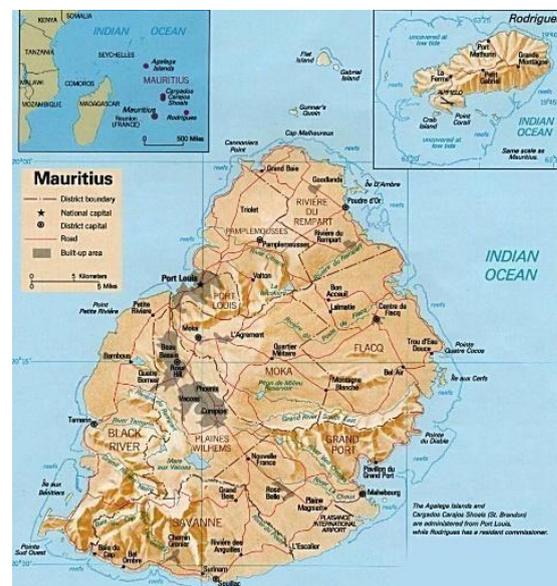
Andiara Valloni – Intern (Team Africa)

Situation

Even though Mauritius has been known for its good governance and human development, its policies fail to properly address gender gap and drug issues on the island, especially regarding women users (Reid 2009; Johnston 2013; Chelin 2021). Mauritius has great achievements regarding women's empowerment such as appointing a woman as president in 2015, 39% of senior positions in governments are women, and it was ranked by the World Bank as one of the six best economies in addressing discriminatory laws and regulations that limit women's equality of opportunity (Chelin, 2021). Nevertheless, the country also hides serious rates of drug use, especially among women.

Introduction

Mauritius consists of a group of islands situated in the eastern coast of Africa, about 500 miles from Madagascar. Mauritius is the main island where the capital Port Louis is situated. The other islands are Rodrigues, Agaléga, and St. Brandon. The country has approximately 1.271 million inhabitants according to the 2020 census and two major ethnic groups: Indo-Pakistani and Creole (a mix of French and African descent), followed by Chinese and other Franco-Mauritian descent (Mauritius Government, 2021). English



and French are considered the official languages of Mauritius, although Creole is also spoken by a significant number of people in the country and is considered its native language. The major religions are Hinduism (approximately 50%) and Christianity (around 30%). Other religions in smaller scale are Islam and Buddhism. Mauritius achieved its independence in

1968 as a constitutional monarchy. In 1992 it became a Republic and since then, has a unitary parliament.

The current president is Prithvirajsing Roopun elected in 2019, member of the Militant Socialist Movement.

Background

Mauritius was an unknown island for a long time and its history is marked by different occupations. It was probably first visited by Arab sailors in the Middle Ages. In the fifteen century, the Portuguese arrived on the island and Domingo Fernandez Pereira became the first European to discover the country, however, as long as the Portuguese didn't have interest in the area they didn't settle (Mauritius Government, 2021). In 1598, the Dutch squadron led by Admiral Wybrand Van Warwyck, arrived at the island and baptized it as "Mauritius" in honor of Maurice Van Nassau. The Dutch introduced sugar-cane, domestic animals, and deer to the Island and stayed for years, exploiting ebony by using African slave labor. Due to the harsh conditions of the island such as frequent cyclones, rats, and plagues destroying crops, the settlement never developed enough, causing the Dutch to abandon the island in 1710 (Mauritanian Archeology, 2021). In 1715, French settlers claimed the island and established its occupation in 1721. During the French period, the so-called "Isle de France" received people from several countries as India, Madagascar, Europe, Africa, and China, due to an attempt to develop agriculture in the island. Finally, in 1810, Great Britain landed in the north of the island and overpowered the French island. Through the treaty of Paris (1814) the island regained its name as "Mauritius" and it was ceded to Great Britain, including the Rodrigues and Seychelles islands. The British remained in power until 1968 when Mauritius gained its independence (Mauritius Government, 2021).

Mauritius achieved its independence in 1968 with a governor-general on the island representing the British monarch as the head of state. In 1992, by an amendment created in 1991, the island became a Republic and now, with a president as the head of the State (Britannica, 2021). Since its independence, Mauritius has had a multiparty system, allowing regular transfers of power between parties through fair elections. Civil liberties are generally upheld. Although, the political leadership remains held by a few families and ethnic divisions are prominent in politics. Corruption is also an issue in the island and journalists are occasionally harassed (Freedom House, 2021).

Drugs in Mauritius

Despite Mauritius' great social and economic situation, it also has a large number of drug users. Mauritius had one of the highest numbers in Africa of drug users per capita in 2010 (Chelin, 2021). The island is considered one of the arrival points for illicit drugs coming from Asia, and distributed to Europe and North America. In addition, Port Louis has its own domestic demand, and injection drugs are the most consumed in the country, consequently



causing HIV and Hepatitis C epidemics (The New Humanitarian, 2007). In 2012 the percentage was about 14% of *Drug Injection Users* (DIU) related to HIV, while in 2010 this number abruptly increased to 73% (Johnston, 2013). Mauritius is constantly intercepting drug traffic cases in the country and the

Mauritius Revenue Authority often updates the drugs seizures through its website. As an example, 561.11 grams of heroin was seized by the authorities in October 2020, also 2.090 grams of cocaine in December 2020, 1.167 grams of synthetic drugs and so on (Mauritius Revenue Authority, 2021).

Drugs and Gender

According to recent studies (Reid 2009; Johnston 2013; Chelin 2021) the largest number of DIU and HIV affected



people are female sex workers. In 2013, the rate of heroin injection was about 61.8% of women against 42.5% amongst men. Drug consumption is normally related to social neglect and low income. In this sense, women have been experiencing a marginalization and stigma when it comes to Mauritius' rehabilitation efforts. The country has been failing to account for the gender gap. As mentioned by Chellin (2021), male drug users are more likely to find low-skill jobs than women due to social stigma, and Mauritius' policies to combat the use of injection drugs do not address this particularity. Mauritius policies against drugs are

punitive in its majority. Authorities still punish people for drug consumption with imprisonment or fines. Such approaches did not diminish the drug consumption in the country and actually the HIV had significantly increased. Reid (2009), affirms that drug criminalization contributes to Drug Injection Users. In 2017, the government had decided to orientate its efforts to a harm-reduction policy that resulted in a fall of HIV rates infection among drug users and it was the first time in years that the percentage of women users decreased when compared with male drug users (Chellin, 2021). Mauritius' government is working with NGOs and has initiated some programs in order to reduce the DIU, encouraging users to enter rehabilitation as well as to be tested for HIV (The New Humanitarian, 2007). Other organizations have also created some rehabilitation facilities exclusive for women, helping them to develop skills and enhance their chance to start micro-business (Chellin, 2021).

Conclusion

Mauritius is one of the most developed countries in Africa, especially amongst economic and social related issues. Nevertheless, there are some problems that still need to be solved and analyzed, the one that has been noticed during these years is the drug use and traffic and its consequences on the island. The country is considered a point for illicit drug traffic coming from Asian and also presents its own national demand. Mauritius has one of the highest rates of drug use per capita in the African continent and drug injections is the major problem. Researchers show that the most affected parcel of the population by the use of drug injection are women and especially female sexual workers. Despite the country's efforts to combat the traffic and also to reduce the high number of drug injection users, Mauritius fails to address robust policies to combat the issue. Especially regarding the gender differences due to the consequences of drug use, the country does not account for the issue in its policies, NGOs and other institutions have been creating its own projects to help and support women users.

As a recommendation, the Mauritius government should improve its policies to combat the high rate of drug users in the country as well as take advantage of the serious that has been produced by health and social experts (state your three sources here again). The country has a great potential to deal with the problem deeper by diagnosing its roots, as well as contributing and supporting NGOs which already work with the issue. As affirmed by many specialists, a punitive approach to deal with drug users

in Mauritius has not shown positive effects in the country and sometimes even lead to an increase of the drug user's rate.

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