

11th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of IOR-ARC

Bengaluru Communique

We the Ministers of the Member States of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), met for the 11th Meeting of the Council of Ministers at Bengaluru, India, on 15 November 2011. Our discussions were facilitated by the recommendations of the preceding meetings of the Committee of Senior Officials, IOR Academic Group, Working Group on Trade & Investment and the IOR Business Forum.

We were delighted to welcome the Republic of Seychelles back as a member of IOR-ARC family.

Our deliberations emphasized the increased salience of the Indian Ocean in the contemporary setting. Our maritime domain is at the crossroads of commerce and its busy energy trade routes pass through vulnerable points. The menace of piracy has assumed alarming proportions in recent years. Our cities have been the target of global terror. Our region's susceptibilities to natural and manmade disasters, issues of sustainable development of our countries and the well-being of our peoples, of the requirement of resources, environmentally friendly technologies and renewable energy to handle challenges of changing climate, the management and sustainable harvesting of the Indian Ocean's bounty, all these were foremost in our minds and the peoples we represent.

The Indian Ocean is a part of our collective destiny, and there is clearly a case for developing a holistic vision and working cooperatively towards its realization if we are to cope with the challenges of the 21st century. We have reiterated our commitment to furthering the goals of IOR-ARC of promoting sustained growth, balanced development and stability, co-operation based on mutual trust and respect, common interests and similar approaches towards the pressing issues of our region.

We identified sectors of common and contemporary interest, which should guide our Association's work as we further deepen and give intra-regional cooperation greater relevance and value.

We expressed our shared concern on the prevailing situation regarding maritime security in the Indian Ocean, particularly at the growing level of piracy off the Horn of Africa which poses a threat to international and regional navigation, maritime commerce and the safety of sea farers. In this regard we fully support the international efforts at the UN and the several initiatives at the regional level, as well as the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia which is coordinating anti-piracy efforts. We committed ourselves to cooperate fully through sharing of information and through technical assistance to jointly combat this menace. We noted that stabilisation of Somalia will contribute to dealing with piracy in the region. As members take practical steps consistent with international law to combat piracy, we agreed that IOR-ARC could serve as an effective vehicle for sharing information, experience and best practices. We encouraged members to actively

participate in international conferences, regional symposia and workshops being held in the region dealing with these issues.

The Rim has faced the devastating impact of a tsunami a few years ago, and our countries have faced cyclones, monsoon floods and similar natural disasters. Oil spills and marine pollution are recurring threats. Sharing of experiences and best practices through workshops and through capacity building would help in better preparedness to tackle the consequences of disasters, and we have adopted this approach.

Fisheries and marine resources occupy important place in the economies and livelihood of the IOR-ARC member countries. We underscored the importance of deepening cooperation among IOR-ARC members, including in the management and sustainable harvesting of fish stocks and combating illegal fishing and damaging fishing techniques, to further consolidate cooperation under IOR-ARC. The IOR-ARC Fisheries Support Unit set up under the aegis of the Sultanate of Oman could function as a nodal institution to respond to the interests and requirements of member states.

Intra-regional trade amounts to 24% of the global trade and it is increasing. We have the capacity to take this process further. Infrastructure building and trade facilitation are areas in which we would be especially interested. We encourage IOR-ARC forums to reach out to the business and commercial expertise that exists in the region, with improved dissemination of market and supply side analyses and reports to support intra-regional growth of business. We also discussed possibility of initiation of a comprehensive study on the feasibility of preferential trading arrangements for the region including in a variable geometry. We are of the firm view that the academic, scientific and business communities of our membership would find their participation in the wide variety of trade, academic and tourism exhibitions and fairs held in our region of benefit and use, and encourage them to do so.

Science and Technology, and in a wider sense, the whole IOR Academic effort are areas which, in our opinion, need close attention with a recalibration of methodology and approach. We need to understand our region and our shared maritime domain better, we need to look at the development of technologies relevant to our peoples' needs. Meteorology and the study of the monsoons, marine biology and management of our coastal zones are all areas of relevance; so also are energy efficient and renewable energy technologies, capacity building in ICT, analytical studies on investment promotion etc. We emphasize the need for cross-fertilization of ideas between the Academic and Business Forums and the Working Group on Trade and Investment to strengthen overall cooperation under IOR-ARC. We are convinced that educational mobility and academic exchanges have the potential to contribute to this effort.

We appreciate the diversity and richness of the region's tourism potential and tourism promotion is an attractive vehicle for socio-economic growth and development in the IOR-ARC region. We believe that intra-regional tourism offers interesting possibilities and suggest that relevant authorities of member countries target this sector for growth to

realize the potential of cooperation to fuller extent. We have noted that the second phase of Tourism Feasibility Study is being undertaken at the initiative of the Sultanate of Oman and look forward to its early completion.

We also agree that cultural exchanges would help in promoting people-to-people contacts, contribute to greater appreciation of our diverse capacities, social and cultural values, build mutual confidence and enhance the visibility and value of our Association.

In all these sectors, capacity building is a key instrument. We encourage Member States to make full use of capacity building programmes and workshops that members organize. We would like this aspect to be studied and remedial action suggested, so that the considerable efforts that are put into organizing these activities are put to optimum use.

We agreed to consider a new name for our Association. We directed our senior officials to undertake necessary consultations and report at our next meeting.

We express our appreciation for the leadership provided to the Association by Yemen as the Chair of IOR-ARC over the last two years. We welcome India as the incoming Chair and Australia as Vice Chair of the Association and extend our support and cooperation to it during its Chairmanship in our collective efforts.

We welcome the new Secretary General Ambassador K.V. Bhagirath of India. We would also like to record our appreciation of the contributions of Ambassador Morteza Sarmadi, Secretary General during his term of office.

We thank the Minister of External Affairs of the Republic of India for hosting the 11th COM at Bengaluru.

Bengaluru
November 15, 2011