

IOR Association for Regional Cooperation
7th Council of Ministers
(Tehran, 7th March 2007)

**Statement delivered by Mr. Wilfrid BERTILE
Vice President of the Regional Council of La Reunion (FRANCE)**

Mr. Chairman,
Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies & Gentlemen,

- I am very happy to be able to speak in front of this honorable assembly today in Tehran. My first words will go to our Iranian host to thank them for their generous hospitality. I would like also to express my deeply concern about the terrible events that have occurred in Indonesia.
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, Mr. Douste-Blazy, could not attend this meeting of the Indian Ocean Rim. He expresses his regrets all more than it is the tenth anniversary of IOR. So I was asked, as an elected official and vice president of the Regional Council of La Reunion Island, to express in his name the commitment of France to this organization. **La Reunion Island is an overseas region of France, a full-competent French department**, and the only European region in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, France as well as the European Union want to promote the regional integration of our island in this region.
- As you know France was granted the status of “dialogue’s partner” of IOR-ARC in 2001. Since 2003 we have expressed our interest to develop stronger relations with your organization by attending every council of ministers.
- The presence of France at this meeting is also the result of a long History of French presence in the Indian Ocean, particularly in La Reunion Island. This ancient presence and the fact that the Reunion island population has origins not only from Europe and France, but from Africa and Asia, are two of the reasons why we want today to develop a better cooperation with neighboring countries.
- We also believe that La Reunion Island can offer **interesting opportunities for the regional cooperation**. In year 2000, the French overseas departments like Reunion Island have been granted the ability to negotiate and conclude cooperation agreements with their neighboring countries, in the name of the French Gouvernement.
- Reunion Island can offer many other many opportunities to develop stronger relations with Indian Ocean Rim countries, in the health sector for example. We are currently developing a research center, which will be part of a regional network aiming at **preventing us from epidemic disease like the Chickungunya**

fever that has had very damaging consequences on local population and tourism in the South West Indian Ocean in 2005.

- Reunion Island has played an active role in a regional cooperation organization: the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) **since France was granted full membership in 1986**. France has then become the first contributor to the IOC budget.
- France finance cooperation initiatives and uses the Reunion island capacities to realize projects in different fields such as the protection of coastal regions and coral reefs, the protection of fishing resources and the prevention from illegal fishing. We are currently working with our partners within IOC on the creation of a network of universities and research facilities in the Indian Ocean. Concerning IOR activities, France and Reunion island authorities think that the time has come to take part to concrete projects such the **feasibility study on tourism**, the **Fisheries Support Unit (FSU)**, as well as the **University Mobility in the Indian Ocean Region (UMIOR)**. To that effect, we would be ready to explore the possibility of a financial contribution to IOR projects, such as the Special Fund.
- I am convinced that you could use this opportunities offered by La Reunion in a more efficient way. This is the reason why I think that our current status in your organization could be upgraded. You could associate more closely France to your projects, particularly in the fields where we have a valuable experience in the regional context. We have already designated our Ambassador to Mauritius as “special representative” to be better informed of the work of your organization in order to be able to associate ourselves to your projects and activities.

Mr Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen

- As France has developed a very active partnership with the neighboring countries of La Reunion through the participation of the IOCs projects, France is eager to develop stronger ties with the IOR ARC, and we believe in a dynamic future of your organization .
- We also think that the better way to achieve such a goal would be to grant us full membership of IOR ARC, but as a first step we would invite you to enhance our association to your activities.
- In the context of globalization, we are deeply convinced that we must reconcile history and geography by associating more efficiently France and Reunion island to your organization.

Thank you for your attention.