

Speech by

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(i) Inauguration of New Premises for the IOR-ARC Secretariat, and

(ii) Opening of Bi-annual Meeting of Committee of Senior Officials

at NeXTeracom Tower, Ebène at 09.30 a.m on 7 May, 2012

**H.E. Mr. Sudhir Vyas, Secretary, Economic Relations,
Ministry of External, and Chairperson of IOR-ARC
Committee of Senior Officials;**

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Ambassador K.V. Bhagirath, Secretary General of IOR-ARC;

Distinguished Delegates; and

Media Representatives

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am particularly pleased to extend to you all a very warm welcome to Mauritius for participation in this two-fold event this morning, namely:

- the inauguration of the new premises housing the IOR-ARC Secretariat, and

- the 2nd Bi-Annual Meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was indeed a singular honour for me to proceed, a few minutes ago, with the inauguration of the new premises of the Secretariat of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation. I would like to seize this opportunity to convey the apology of the Prime Minister for not being able to participate personally in the inauguration ceremony.

The decision of the Government of Mauritius to provide these new and state-of-the-art facilities, in the congenial business environment of Eben City, shows our unflinching commitment to the Organisation, and also our earnest desire for our Organisation to deliver on the objectives we have assigned to it.

In a way, today's inaugural ceremony of the new premises of the IOR-ARC, in my view, completes a process of rejuvenation of the Organisation we started a couple of years ago with the adoption of a new charter in 2010, the appointment last year of a seasoned diplomat, Ambassador K.V. Bhagirath, as the new secretary

general, and a new chair, India to be supported by a Troika comprising the current, out-going and in-coming chairs of the Organisation. We have reaffirmed our commitment to facilitate and promote cooperation by bringing together Government, business and the academia.

Moreover, by adopting a new member-driven approach, underpinned by the principle of good governance, we want to ensure the smooth and effective implementation of our programme.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mauritius has been closely associated with the conceptualisation and the setting-up of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation. Starting with 7 members and a Pilot Coordinating Mechanism in 1997, it has to-day grown into a full-fledged Secretariat. It has a membership of 19 countries from a region of vital strategic importance. Notwithstanding our diversity, we do share a large convergence of interests and values and the objective to promote sustainable development of the region and the member states.

Fifteen years in the life of a regional cooperation Organisation is not too long a period to enable us to make any judgement in view of the complex nature of the issues involved and the need to build consensus. But, it does provide an opportunity to take stock of what we have been able to do together, make adjustment, where necessary, and also to reflect on the various present and emerging challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Since the inception of the IOR-ARC the world has experienced major changes and tasks ahead are daunting. It is confronted with a multiplicity of crisis, including the euro/financial crisis and a gloomy economic outlook Europe. There is also a paradigm shift in the balance of global economic power with the emergence of new global players and drivers of change. This has serious geo-strategic and geo-political implications.

Moreover, most of us are faced with problems associated with climate change, rising food and oil prices and the recent phenomenon of piracy in the Indian Ocean. These challenges underscore the need to constantly build and strengthen resilience and have a more effective coordination of our common development efforts. In spite of the great disparity in the levels of

development of our countries, we need to map out a vision of economic cooperation to enhance trade and investment.

The scope of the IOR-ARC has expanded over the 15 years of its existence. Members are willing to cooperate today in areas like Science and Technology, Education, Health, Transport and Maritime Security. There is, no doubt, that increased regional trade within the IOR-ARC region, if pursued properly and equitably, offers the prospects of stronger economic growth through greater regional cooperation and integration. We need also to mobilise the support of our private sector and our Dialogue Partners, in this endeavour.

Mauritius, for instance, attaches much importance to maritime security which is also being discussed in other fora such as EU, AU, SADC, COMESA and IOC. An IOR-ARC Forum on maritime security is expected to be held in Australia later this year. This will be an opportunity to review and examine on-going collaborative work to address the maritime security issues for the region.

In my view, the time has come for our Organisation to build bridges with Africa to which continent some of us belong. Some IOR countries are developing important trade and economic relations individually with an emerging Africa that is increasingly

being recognised as the next pole of economic growth and development. I propose that we ask our secretariat to explore the possibility of seeking, as a first step, an observer status with the African Union and Regional Economic Communities, like COMESA and SADC.

Our Organisation has four members which form part of the G-20. We must find a way to discuss issues being treated by the G-20 so that our four members can take on board our concerns and legitimate expectations when decisions are taken. Through such an approach we can help each other and thus better protect and promote our common interests.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The huge amount of natural resources available in our region together with its vast markets for goods, services and investment represent immense opportunities for our economic development that will help enhance the welfare of our people. These resources, including the land mass and vast ocean, will have to be tapped in an effective manner. I am here referring to the blue economy which could be another pillar to sustain our development efforts.

To conclude, I would like to urge our senior officials to come up with concrete recommendations for our next Council Meeting

which will be held later this year, in order to take decisively forward our common agenda in a spirit of unity and solidarity.

With these words, I wish the senior officials successful deliberations.

I have now the pleasure to declare the 2nd Bi-Annual Meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials open.

Thank you for your kind attention.

A. B.