



**17th Council of Ministers Meeting (COM)  
Padang, Indonesia  
23 October 2015**

**Press Release**

The 15<sup>th</sup> Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Council of Ministers Meeting (COM) was held on 23 October 2015 in Padang, Indonesia and marked the handing over of IORA Chairmanship from Australia to Indonesia for a period of two years (2015-2017). Indonesia invited South Africa to assume the role of Vice-Chair and recognised the commendable achievements of Australia as the past Chair, particularly placing the blue economy and women's economic empowerment on the IORA agenda.

Indonesia's Foreign Minister said 'given the vital importance of the Indian Ocean for us all, it is imperative that we sustain peace, stability and security in the region and for that reason Indonesia has identified the "Strengthening Maritime Cooperation in a Peaceful and Stable Indian Ocean" as an overarching theme of its Chairmanship. The Council of Ministers issued a Declaration on Maritime Cooperation which recognised that the Indian Ocean connects the countries of the region to each other, and links it to other regions of the world, as a crossroad for global trade, commerce and economic activities.

Indonesia introduced an important initiative to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> IORA Anniversary in 2017 by establishing an Ad-Hoc Committee on the IORA Concord. This historic anniversary will be marked by an inaugural IORA Summit from 5-6 March 2017 where Heads of Government will issue an IORA Concord to enhance regionalism. Secretary-General Bhagirath said "the IORA Concord will be not only a statement of intent, but a pragmatic and practical instrument for forging regional synergies to promote peace and prosperity in the region".

The assembled Ministers also issued the Padang Communiqué which highlighted key outcomes from the Meeting, including welcoming the Federal Republic of Somalia as the 21<sup>st</sup> IORA Member State and the Federal Republic of Germany as the seventh Dialogue Partner. Increased engagement with Dialogue Partners and the private sector are features of Indonesia's term as Chair. Member States and Dialogue Partners have generously pledged support for activities to drive forward the IORA's agenda, including contributions of US\$250,000 by Indonesia, US\$ 100,000 by China, and US\$100,000 from India.

The Blue Economy - the sustainable development of oceans - remains a crucial area of IORA's work and has been further strengthened. Germany will host a Blue Economy Forum in 2016 and Indonesia has committed to host a Second Blue Economy Conference in 2017. Australia launched a grand challenge 'Reengineering Aquaculture for Sustainability' to source scientific and technological innovations from a global audience of problem solvers by allocating AU\$3 million (AUD) to support the

best ideas resulting from this challenge. The meeting commended the upcoming Second International Indian Ocean Expedition, and welcomed opportunities for future collaboration in scientific research and collaboration.

Ministers commended the First IORA Ministerial Blue Economy Conference which was held in Mauritius from 5-6 September 2015. The Conference focussed on fisheries and aquaculture; renewable ocean energy; seaports and shipping; and offshore hydrocarbons and seabed minerals and has resulted in new, concrete project proposals.

IORA looks forward to a full and dynamic year ahead with several events being planned. This includes the Second Economic and Business Conference (EBC-II) hosted by the United Arab Emirates which will gather IORA Trade and Industry Ministers and business representatives from 11-13 April 2016 in Dubai.

2015 has been one of the busiest years in IORA's history, where projects were implemented in the priority areas, namely (i) maritime safety and security, (ii) disaster risk management, (iii) trade and investment facilitation, (iv) fisheries management, (v) academic, science and technology cooperation, and (vi) tourism and cultural exchanges, as well as women's economic empowerment as a cross-cutting issue.

Some of the commendable initiatives held since the last Council of Ministers Meeting includes the meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment in Seychelles, the launch of the IORA Sustainable Development Programmes in Bangladesh and Tanzania, the Second Meeting of Tourism Experts in South Africa, the second Indian Ocean Dialogue in Australia and the launch of the first edition of the Indian Ocean Journal.

This Council of Ministers and its related Meetings was the best attended Council meeting held with over 290 delegates including foreign ministers, senior officials, officials, businesspersons and academics from across the IORA Member States and Dialogue Partners gathered at the COM and the Working Group on Trade and Investment (WGTI), the Indian Ocean Rim Academic Group (IORAG) and the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) that took place from 20-22 October 2015. The Indian Ocean Rim Business Forum (IORBF), organised in conjunction with the Trade Expo Indonesia on 20 October 2015 in Jakarta, stressed the need for engagement of the private sectors and regional policies to enhance trade.