



## PRESS RELEASE

IORA Ministerial Conference on Women's Economic Empowerment - A Pre-requisite for Sustainable Development  
28-29 August 2018  
Mauritius

The first ever IORA Ministerial Conference on Women's Economic Empowerment – A Pre-requisite for Sustainable Development was held on 28-29 August 2018 at the Ravenala Hotel, Balaclava, Mauritius.

This Conference assembled Ministers and senior officials responsible for Gender/Women's Affairs of IORA Member States and Dialogue Partners to strengthen IORA's women's economic empowerment agenda. In his Inaugural Address, Honorable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs, External Communications and National Development Unit, Minister of Finance and Economic Development of the Republic of Mauritius, stated, "*women's economic empowerment should be at the core of IORA and it is critical to gauge the patterns that are based on inequalities. This Conference offers the right platform to address unsustainable policies and adopt a unified approach*".

Ministers and heads of delegations adopted the 'Balaclava Declaration on Women's Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality as a Pre-requisite for Sustainable Development' which affirmed that gender inclusiveness, gender equality, rights of women and girls are essential for strong sustainable and balanced growth.

The Hon. Mrs Fazila Jeewa-Daureeawoo, Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Outer Islands and Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare of the Republic of Mauritius, remarked "*it was a great honour to launch the Working Group for Women's Empowerment on 28 August 2018. This is the first new IORA body created in 12 years and is a key deliverable in the IORA Action Plan for 2017-21. It will be a powerful mechanism for regional collaboration on gender equality*". Australia and Mauritius will co-chair the new Working Group for a period of two years.

Member States developed a Work Plan for the newly established Working Group with six pillars: Skills and Capacity Building; Innovation and Technology; Research Based Initiatives; Networking; Resource Mobilisation; and Access to Finance and Market Opportunities. This is a living document in which Member States and Dialogue Partners have pledged to projects and activities, and identifies areas for further elaboration. Australia announced a three-year commitment to partner with UNWomen to improve data collection and analysis in the Indian Ocean Rim in order to better measure gender gaps and help policy makers implement effective policies and programs.

The IORA Secretary-General, Dr Nomvuyo Nokwe said "*we were also delighted with the first-ever commitments from both the UK and the US to collaborate with IORA through concrete projects to advance women's economic empowerment, namely to improve women's participation in the Blue Economy and to forge opportunities for women in business respectively. IORA welcomes deeper engagement by the Dialogue Partners, along with important stakeholders such as the International Trade Centre*".

The Conference was attended by 19 Member States and all 7 Dialogue Partners. Participants affirmed that the prosperity of the region would only be realised fully by investing in the empowerment of women and the importance of mainstreaming gender equality.

**IORA Secretariat**  
**29 August 2018**