

Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation
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Head of the French delegation and
Vice-president of the Regional Council of La Reunion

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Government of India for the invitation, its warm welcome and for the excellent organisation of this IOR-ARC Council of Ministers, which France is very pleased to attend.

France is willing and ready to work with the IOR-ARC and all the members of this important Association.

Although France's mainland is unquestionably located in Western Europe, we are also unquestionably an Indian Ocean Rim State. As a matter of fact, two French departments, namely La Reunion Island and the Island of Mayotte, are in the Indian Ocean. Over 1.1 million of our citizens call those Islands home, and their challenges and opportunities are overwhelmingly the same as those of their neighbouring countries.

In that regard, our Government strives to facilitate and encourage the cooperation of La Reunion Island and the Island of Mayotte with their Indian Ocean neighbours as well as their progressive integration in the region in order to meet our common challenges, and to achieve better benefits for the people in the area. It's for that reason that the French territories in the Indian Ocean, including La Reunion Island and the Island of Mayotte, have been granted specific powers to develop international relations with their neighbouring States.

La Reunion is playing a very active role promoting and developing regional cooperation in many areas, including health and science, biotechnology, climate change and meteorology issues, fishery resources management, the development of ocean based technologies for renewable energies, tourism and ICT.

I'm very honoured that our Government has appointed me as vice-president of the Regional Council of La Reunion, to lead the French delegation once again to this assembly.

The progressive integration of La Reunion and Mayotte in their local environment is high on France's agenda. We have, over the years, developed mutually fruitful relations with not only nearby countries, including Madagascar, Mauritius, The Comoros, Seychelles, South Africa and Mozambique, but also with other member States of IOR-ARC, in particular India and Australia.

Excellencies,

The Indian Ocean is facing important challenges, which will define our common future, including the protection of biodiversity, preventing and fighting maritime piracy as well as maritime pollution, fisheries management, and natural disasters preparedness and response. But more importantly, these challenges can be turned into great opportunities, provided that we work together and mobilise all of our available resources.

The Indian Ocean has traditionally not benefitted from much consideration and recognition. The creation of the IOR-ARC was the right response to that situation, and we are very confident that this Organisation will develop its full potential in the next few years. We are also very committed to work together for that purpose.

Therefore, as France is also an Indian Ocean Rim State, we would like to see our current status of “dialogue partner” enhanced to that of an “associated member”.

On this point, I would like to emphasize that France is fully committed and prepared to take on that responsibility, especially since France already plays an important role in some vital issues in the Indian Ocean. For example, France is contributing in securing commercial navigation in two ways: through its participation in the European Union Naval Force of the coast of Somalia, also known as the “Atalanta Operation”, and through its own navy patrol in the South of the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, France is an effective member of the Indian Ocean Commission.

For all these reasons, we are looking forward to working closely with the IOR-ARC and its Chair in the future.

Thank you for your attention.