

Statement by His Excellency Prof. G. L. Peiris, MP, Minister of External Affairs of Sri Lanka at the 12th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of IOR-ARC on 2nd November 2012, Gurgaon, India.

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies,

May I begin by thanking the government of India very warmly for the excellent arrangements that have been made for this meeting.

His Excellency Salman Khurshid who just assumed office as the Minister of External Affairs of India made the comments earlier this morning that he would like to emphasize, he has said of tangible benefits, that I think for IOR-ARC, for the people of the twenty countries that belong to this organization. I think that is a very important remark that he made at the point of departure (from the meeting room).

In any organization, Mr. Chairman, it is natural that the first few years are spent on conceptualizing and identifying the value system which should underpin the work that is undertaken. The Secretary General in his remarks today said very rightly that IOR-ARC today has come of age. In that situation, Mr. Chair, it is the view of the government of Sri Lanka that it is necessary at this point in the development of our organization to identify specifically projects which will entail essential benefits to the people of our region.

In that context, we welcome the initiatives that were taken exactly one year ago in Bengaluru, India to prioritize model areas, in this case six seeds identified as which requiring particular attention, in areas like maritime cooperation, trade and investment.

I think the contemporary challenge for us within the framework of those priority areas is to identify specific options. For example the Minister of External Affairs of India said this morning that India is planning to host a conference next year on piracy. I think that would be a very appropriate occasion to examine some of the lacunae in maritime security; with regard to undertaking prosecution, with regard to undertaking jurisdiction, the mechanisms that are available today need attention. I think it is also necessary to think about the strengths of a particular country to make contribution to the different fields of works that is being done by the others. For example, Oman has taken leadership with regard to fisheries and transport including shipping and the Islamic Republic of Iran has undertaken very valuable work with regard to technology transfer. I think Mr. Chairman, we also need to recognize that different countries within this organization have their needs in several aspects and we should not seek to achieve total uniqueness in identified projects, but which are of particular relevance to a sub-region. And in that setting that Sri Lanka is very happy about the initiative taken by Seychelles and Mauritius to conclude an economic broad agreement which has been registered in the United Nations.

This year on the sidelines of United Nations General Assembly, there was a very productive meeting of small States in respect of which the Republic of Singapore convened and that kind of initiative I think will impart the particular options and pragmatism to the work of IOR-ARC. I think we also need to remember that it should not be seen the matter before this organization is to concentrate exclusively on relations between the governments; and people to people contact is very important and in that regard, the work of the business community has also very special importance.

And we are very happy about India and Australia giving leadership to this organization and they have the firm assurance of the government of Sri Lanka that we look forward to working with them very actively and purposefully.

Finally, Mr. Chair, I would like to say that Sri Lanka today is emerging from the shadow of conflict which has taken three decades. And today we are looking at accelerating our economy; the Blue Economy is a particular importance to us as an island nation and on those perspectives Sri Lanka is fully committed to the work of this organization.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.