

**Statement by Deputy-Minister H.E. Mr Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim,  
Deputy Minister, Department of International Relations & Cooperation  
General Debate: 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Council of Ministers**

**Chairperson  
Your Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is my pleasure to represent South Africa at this 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation. Minister Nkoana-Mashabane expresses her deep regret in not being able to attend today's meeting, but asked that I kindly convey her warmest wishes to your Excellencies representing IOR-ARC Member States here today.

On behalf of my delegation, may I take this opportunity to thank the Government of India for its warm hospitality and excellent arrangements for the hosting of this meeting. It is also wonderful that this dynamic city of Gurgaon was chosen in which to host this meeting, affording us this opportunity to have a glimpse of what this great country has to offer.

Excellencies,

Please be assured that South Africa is keen to continue to work with the Chair and Vice-Chair, as well as the other Member States of the IOR-ARC, in our quest to strengthen our organization in order that it may begin to address issues that affect the lives of millions of people living in our region.

It is interesting to note that the theme for this year's Council is "IOR-ARC – 15 Years Old and the Decade Ahead"

While we will agree that fifteen years in the life of an organization like IOR-ARC, it is not sufficient to enable us to make any judgement, in view of the complex nature of the issues involved and the need to build consensus. However, it does provide an opportunity to take stock of what we have been able to do together, to possibly make some adjustments where necessary and to also reflect on the various present and emerging challenges that we face.

Looking back, we must pay tribute to our foresightedness in establishing the IOR-ARC. While progress has sometimes been slow, the changing geopolitical and natural environment of the past fifteen years have catapulted the Indian Ocean region back into the prominent position it held many centuries ago.

Those of us charged with the responsibility of building bridges need to collaborate more closely with each other and with our international partners in achieving our objectives. We cannot function in isolation and must therefore seek further avenues for collaboration with each other.

Since the launch of IOR-ARC, the world has experienced major changes and the challenges ahead are daunting. We are confronted with a worldwide financial crisis and a gloomy economy outlook. 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 major geo-strategic and geo-political implications.

Moreover, many of us are faced with problems associated with climate change, rising food and oil prices and the ongoing challenges relating to piracy in our region. 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.

We should regard our organization as a vehicle for the transformation of the lives of the peoples of this region. Our diversity and plurality offers immense possibilities. South Africa is committed to engage with its partners and see this Association make tangible progress to unlock regional opportunities and deliver positive outcomes. We are all committed to this responsibility and look forward to cooperating with Member States to achieve our common goals.

Excellencies,

You will recall at our last meeting in Bengaluru, this Council requested that South Africa extends the term of secondment of Mr Vish Badal, who was then on secondment from South Africa to the Secretariat in Mauritius. South Africa is committed to the strengthening of the Secretariat in order that it may be effective in implementing the mandate of this Council. To demonstrate our support and commitment to the IOR-ARC programme and activities, I am pleased to announce that we have taken your request one step further and South Africa has agreed to the secondment of Mr. Graham Anderson for a period of four years. Mr Anderson commenced his duties at the Secretariat from 1<sup>st</sup> September this year and will be fully sponsored by the South African Government.

Excellencies,

As we explore the way forward for IOR-ARC, we must recognize Africa's potential as a "swing continent", through leveraging its natural geo-strategic location in respect of being positioned in the middle of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, could provide the impetus for new geo-economic emergence and positioning in the emerging new world order. You will recall that upon a request from this Council, the Secretariat provided its report regarding Observer Status for IOR-ARC at UNGA. I believe that we should now also consider Observer Status for IOR-ARC at the African Union as well. Many Member States continue to develop important trade and economic relations with an emerging Africa. I therefore propose that we explore the possibility of seeking, as a first step, an Observer Status with the African Union.

Chairperson, I believe that the various reports that will be presented to us today by the representatives of the different Working Groups will contain positive suggestions on the way forward. May I therefore take this opportunity of thanking the Committee of Senior Officials for their recommendations emanating from both yesterday's CSO meeting as well as their Bi-Annual Meeting that took place earlier this year in Mauritius. Let us all come together and work together for a better future to secure our beloved planet, including its rich resources such as the Indian Ocean, in the interest of humankind and also notably for our future generations.

Excellencies, in concluding I am sure my colleagues will agree that this organization must be well resourced and there is a political will to ensure that we are effective in achieving our goals. I do hope that we will have some time to deliberate on whether we are adequately resourced.

I thank you.