

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mijarul Quayes, Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh at the
12th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of IOR-ARC in Gurgaon, India on 2
November 2012**

Mr. Chairman,

May I at the outset offer warm congratulations on your assumption of the office of the Minister of External Affairs of India and of the Chair of the IOR-ARC Council of Ministers. I have firm conviction that, under your able stewardship, our deliberations today Council session will be eminently fruitful. Through you, I would like also to extend sincere thanks to the government of India for the warm reception and generous hospitality and for the excellent arrangements made for this meeting. Congratulations are also due to the Government of India for the commendable leadership of the Council of Ministers of IOR-ARC since its 11th Session last year. I would also like to put on record our deep appreciation for the efforts of the Secretary General in infusing dynamism into the work of our Association.

We welcome the Union of Comoros as a member of the Association.

**Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Indian Ocean is not just an extended expanse of blue waters washing our shores. These waters do not separate our nations, but link us, not least as the busiest maritime trade route. Down through the ages, Indian Ocean has been the vehicle for inter-mingling of peoples, cultures and economies across continents. Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation provides the platform to celebrate our common heritage of the Indian Ocean and to craft modern-day cooperative arrangements.

As we mark 15 years of this organization, we can justifiably celebrate the decade and a half of its existence, but we also have a unique occasion for introspection to reflect on our performance since inception and on the future shape that we would like it to take. Although somewhat sluggish in the initial years, our Association has demonstrated some visible progress in recent years. The full functioning of the flagship project the *Regional Centre for Science and Transfer of Technology (RCSTT)*; operationalization of the *Fisheries Support Unit (FSU)*; and near completion of the establishment of the *Maritime Transport Council (MTC)* are note worthy in recent years. The last few years have also seen an exercise of review for the Association to deliver on its promises in full. Notably, we have written a new Charter, staff & financial regulations; increased frequency of meetings; adopted a clustering approach in project formulation; established a special fund for complementing project funding; and identified six priority areas of cooperation. Now that our Association has consolidated its institutional base, it is perhaps time for us to focus our attention on efforts for concrete outcomes. Bangladesh has a particular desire to see IOR-ARC on a forward journey towards a goal of delivery of tangible benefits for all our peoples.

However, as it is recovering from the recession of 2008, the global economy remains fragile. The second round effects of the financial melt-down are being felt in terms of decline in export earning, investment, remittance, ODA, etc, particularly by the developing member states of our Association. We are confident that building on our synergies and complementarities would allow us to withstand such external economic upheavals as well as emerging challenges. The challenge before us is to adopt the appropriate strategy to pursue cooperation in keeping with our principle of 'open regionalism', despite the substantial diversity in geography,

governance and level of development. Our strength lies in our steady growth, a burgeoning middle class that is increasingly confident about its future, a large internal market working as both a manufacturing hub and a consumer base.

Mr. Chairman,

We must keep in mind that many regional organizations subsuming member states of our Association have already progressed far in terms of integration and implementation of various important projects. Selection of projects under of IOR-ARC, therefore, needs great care to avoid duplication and to ensure that they deliver tangible benefits to the people at large. We share the view that many of the projects under our Association has not come to fruition, at least, partly because of loss of focus due to apparent proliferation of proposals without adequate resources or support to translate them into reality. Proposing projects within the broad ambit of the six identified priority areas would be crucial in this regard. We are hopeful that the current exercise of simplifying the Administrative Arrangements for Special Fund will lead to implementation of many important projects.

We welcome the designation of maritime piracy as one of the six stand-alone areas for cooperation during the last COM. Piracy in the Indian Ocean has become a matter of great concern, not only for the maritime industry, but also for the governments all over the world due to its high human and economic cost. Bangladesh shares the concern of other countries concerning this menace. The extent of their search signifies that it would be difficult to curb the threat posed by piracy without a concerted regional, trans-regional and international campaign. Bangladesh believes that effective port administration, well-equipped enforcement agency, judicial and legislative capacity-building as well as counter-piracy measures in the ships are some important immediate measures against piracy in the Indian Ocean. However, in the long run, creation of good order at the sea which would prevent illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing activities in and around Somali waters by other nations would be needed. May I flag that Bangladesh is a party to the Regional Co-operation Agreement Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery (ReCAAP) and is in close touch with the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) as part of her commitment to counter-piracy efforts. We have also initiated discussion on this menace under the forum of South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC). IOR-ARC may consider research, exchange of expertise and information to bridge any missing link. The Secretary General may look at preparing a paper on counter piracy efforts that our Association could undertake without duplicating work in other organizations.

We believe that trade and investment should remain the two key areas of cooperation in our Association. In this vein, we attach importance to progress in those two areas. In spite of the temporary setback in drafting of Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), we support continued study in this area toward the goal of conclusion of such an agreement in future. We also wish to see progress in the drafting of the Agreement on the Promotion of Investment within IOR-ARC.

It would be relevant to mention that maritime transportation is an extremely vital factor for promoting connectivity among our peoples. It is important that we promote further development of the shipping services in the member states. We need to work toward establishment of a free and non-discriminatory regime by which national flag carriers and qualified sailors of one member state can have easy access to the markets of the others.

Mr. Chairman,

May I also raise here that the fisheries sector is an integral part of the economies of our member states. Livelihood of as many as 30 million people of Bangladesh is linked with fishing. Marine fishery is an increasingly important element in this sector. Bangladesh has finalized the domestic process for ratification of the *UN Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions*

of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (1995). About 50 to 60 thousand artisanal fishing units from Bangladesh are on the sea. We are taking measures for ensuring safety and security of these fishermen against robbery or abduction. We are also working with our neighbouring countries to ease the process of repatriation of fishermen who become stranded due to natural disasters or any other force majeure.

We attach particular importance to cooperation in the tourism sector for promoting people-to-people contact. We are in favour of chalking out a strategy to implement the recommendations of the first phase of the Tourism Feasibility Study. We also look forward to the second phase of study that would address all the remaining areas and issues for fostering a balanced development of this sector throughout our region.

Mr. Chairman,

Natural disasters are a recurrent phenomenon for our region, whose severity is being intensified by the impact of climate change. Since disasters strike different countries at different times in an unpredictable manner, it is not possible for any individual country to dedicate a major chunk of its resources solely to manage disasters at the cost of vital sectors of development. We need to assess and address the challenges that climate change poses to climate sensitive sectors of our countries, including water resources; agriculture and therefore, food security; health, energy; urban planning; tourism etc. The Sana'a Communiqué issued from 10th COM on 05 August 2010 stressed the need for greater cooperation in addressing the challenged emanating from climate change.

Mr. Chairman,

IOR-ARC must serve as active agent of change contributing to the betterment of the lives of our people. The potentials of the Indian Ocean Rim are immense. We envisage IOR-ARC as a catalyst for a qualitative impact on people's lives and our capacity to collectively impact all others.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.