

Statement by Mr Salman Khurshid, Minister of External Affairs, Government of India,

External Affairs Minister at the 12th Council of Ministers' Meeting of the

Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are meeting today at an important juncture. We launched IOR-ARC in 1997, a decade and a half ago, with the primary objective of promoting sustained growth and balanced development of the region and of its Member States. IOR-ARC has helped promote understanding and cooperation amongst our countries over these years, yet immense untapped potential remains.

The geo-strategic importance of the Indian Ocean cannot be underestimated. As focus of global economic growth shifts to Asia, it will occupy even greater salience in our strategic perspective. We envision IOR-ARC as a regional body that can respond effectively to this need and enhance our individual and collective capacities to deal with contemporary challenges facing our common maritime domain. It must be strengthened to enable it to rise to our expectations.

We considered it appropriate, therefore, to focus our deliberations today on the theme "IOR-ARC at 15 – the Next Decade". In our view, the objective of this exercise should be to lay down a roadmap and agenda for our Association for the coming years that will eventually establish IOR-ARC as an apex organization for the Indian Ocean region.

Our region is characterized by great diversities in size, population and levels of development. A prospective roadmap for our Association must therefore be inclusive, taking IOR-ARC forward at a pace acceptable to all.

Secondly, in facilitating the creation of a regional climate conducive to peace and prosperity, IOR-ARC should aim at opening as many channels of communication and cooperation amongst its membership as feasible. It must thus be comprehensive, an integrated effort bringing together governments, civil society and business and deepening people-to-people contacts.

In this context, we should consider a university dedicated to a comprehensive range of subjects relevant to the Indian Ocean including its political economy, maritime and environmental issues.

And finally, its agenda must reflect common regional interests that hold value for its membership. We took the first steps when we last met in Bengaluru in November 2011, and identified six priorities for our Association's work, including maritime security and safety, disaster risk reduction, trade & investment facilitation, fisheries management, academic and S & T Cooperation, and tourism and cultural exchanges.

Each of these areas has its own relevance for us. Here I would like to touch on just three aspects.

Economic cooperation is at the core of our collective effort, and we need to consider appropriate initiatives aimed at meeting the developmental, energy and food security needs of our region, new infrastructural linkages with enhanced connectivity, and trade and investment facilitation that builds on the complementarities in our economic strengths.

Job creation for our growing youthful populations is an imperative across our region. Capacity building and skilling in all our identified priority areas is a cross-cutting need, which IOR-ARC can also address.

Economic development cooperation requires a conducive environment to flower. Security of maritime commerce and safety of seafarers are of concern to all of us. There is a need, for example, to be more precise in defining High Risk Areas in the Indian Ocean, based on actual incidents of piracy, as this impacts adversely on insurance premiums and adds to the cost of shipping in our region. India will host an IOR-ARC seminar on maritime security in early 2013, and we should consider its institutionalization as a regional forum for continuing exchange of views and monitoring of the situation.

Finally, we should consider ways and means of providing greater structure to the IOR-ARC process. We could consider having a theme of contemporary relevance for future Council meetings, for example, as we have done for this one, which can help focus discussions on the issues at hand.

Excellencies, I thank you for your attention and look forward to hearing your views.

Gurgaon, 02 November 2012.