

VICE-CHAIR - AUSTRALIA

If I could extend to the Government of India and through my good friend and colleague the Foreign Minister of India our thanks for hosting this conference, but also for the excellent administrative arrangements and for the hospitality received last night. If I could also I pass my thanks to the outgoing Chair the distinguished Foreign Minister of Yemen for his excellent work in the custodianship of this institution in recent times.

Firstly I would like to thank all of our colleagues around the table for extending their confidence in the Government of Australia to become the Vice Chair of this institution for the next two years.

The first responsibility of a Vice Chair is to support the Chairman. So I say to my good friend and colleague Minister Krishna, you will have Australia's full support in your custodianship and Chairmanship of this institution in the period ahead during India's position in the Chair.

I think it is important to ask ourselves some basic questions about why we are here and the purposes of this institution. Perhaps the best way of answering that question is to put it in these terms: why is Australia here? Let me put it down to three core reasons.

The first is, we together with the other countries represented around this table, share this mighty ocean, the Indian Ocean. It laps all of our shores and therefore, naturally, we share a common responsibility to care for it. That's the first responsibility.

The second is this. We also share common interests in the future of the Indian Ocean region. If we think about what that means in practice, it's worth reflecting on the core elements. First we have a common interest in preserving the peace of our Indian Ocean region. We have, secondly, a common interest in preserving the common prosperity of our Indian Ocean region through trade, through investment, but also through development cooperation.

Third we have a common interest in maintaining freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean into the future, because this ocean represents the arteries of global commerce and affecting countries located well beyond the Indian Ocean as well. And therefore we share a common interest to agree on common measures to deal with any threats to the freedom of navigation. My distinguished friend and colleague from India has just referred to the threat of piracy.

Of course we also have a common interest in managing this great blue economy called the 'Indian Ocean' to make sure that we develop the resources of the Indian Ocean in a manner compatible with the principles of sustainable development. We wish to harness the resources of this ocean and its region, but we also want to do so in a way that does not inflict irresponsible damage on the marine environment.

Finally, we share a common interest in acting on the great global challenge of climate change. It affects all of us. It affects many of us in particular, including, most particularly, the small island states of the Indian Ocean, but a number of the other littoral states as well. And I am very conscious, for example, of my discussions over the years with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh about the impact of the low-lying coastal areas of that most populous of countries to the impact of sea inundation.

So friends and colleagues, I think it's worth reflecting in very clear and precise terms what the common interests are which bring us together around this table.

And our final reason for being here as Australia, is not just that we share this mighty ocean, which laps our shores, not just that we share common interests, which we wish to prosecute together, but on top of that if we were to think for a moment about what it would be like right now if over the last 15 or 16 years we did not have a regional institution of this type, I would begin to be fearful of the consequences for the future if our region and the ocean within it began to drift in the wrong way, in a way which undermined the interests of the member states and undermined the interests of the region. And if we did not have this institution, which those who have come before us have built up from meagre foundations 15 years ago to where we stand today, we would be having a discussion about the need for such an institution.

So in summary, friends and colleagues, they are the reasons why we as Australia are members of this institution and have been so since the beginning.

Which of course brings us to Australia's particular characteristics and a perspective we particularly bring to bear. We in Australia are the 12th largest economy in the world, we're the 4th largest economy in Asia after China, Japan and India. We are a 'three-oceans' country: We face the Pacific; we face the Southern Ocean and the world's last remaining wilderness, the Antarctic, which has particular relevance to the future of our planet and also we face the Indian Ocean and the countries represented around this table.

Therefore, we bring an oceanic perspective to bear on all of these matters and we have been from the beginning, by necessity, a maritime power.

As we reflect upon the national circumstances of each country around this table, as you all face the Indian Ocean as well, it's important to reflect on the depth of the economic engagement we all have. If we were simply to imagine a map of the region, and go from east to west and back again, we look at our friends in Indonesia, a major emerging economy of 250 million people, which by the time we reach half century will be a country of some 350 to even 400 million people, and a very large economy and elsewhere in Southeast Asia the dynamos of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Also we move to South Asia, our friend from Bangladesh, Dipu has just joined us, together with our friends in Sri Lanka, and of course the great new rising economic power that is India.

Go to the Gulf and our friends have already spoken to us from Yemen. But I see the Emirates and others here as well as Oman. The centrality of the Gulf to both the travel links, the air links, but also the energy resources of the wider region and the world, bind us together in ways which are often invisible to us because we take them for granted. But if ever there was a threat to the sea lines of communication affecting the delivery of globally energy supplies from the Gulf, or for that matter, from our country Australia, which is one of the largest LNG countries in the world, the largest supplier of many base metals in the world.

And then we go of course to the emerging great economies of Southern and Eastern Africa who are represented here as well. And the population growth of the African continent by the middle of the century. And then of course Australia itself, as well as the island countries of the Indian Ocean, which have particular economic challenges driven by isolation, but also by the particular challenges of climate change. But my point is the economic contribution to this region by the

member states is huge. And our challenge I think is to make the economic engagement between us deeper and broader, because there is much potential still to realise.

We've touched also, and my distinguished Indian colleague did the same, on some of the security threats we have in common. I believe it's very simple. Unless we as an Indian Ocean institution do not deal collectively in partnership with other global institutions with the challenge of piracy, our various member constituencies, our business communities and our civilian populations, as well as our respective governments, will think that we're not doing our jobs.

This problem is real. In 2011, in nine months, 185 attacks against ships off Somalia, hijacking of 28 vessels, 15 vessels are still being held hostage, together with three or four hundred people, we have had piracy operations in the Indian Ocean out to 1750 nautical miles of the East African coast, we have had the spread of piracy down the East African coast, ransoms now being charged are now going to extraordinary heights, and the average now being more than US\$5 million, and these are ransoms for persons.

As well as the impact which it has on global maritime insurance, as well as the impact on, for example, the Government of Egypt and Suez Canal revenues.

All these things are happening. It's not small - it's big. Therefore, in our concrete deliberations today, I would strongly recommend that we put our minds together as to how we work concretely and practically to deal with what is a land-based problem in Somalia, a maritime policing problem, which so many governments around this table are participating, but also a basic problem of common legal jurisdictions as well. So that those that are held to account, don't fall through legal loop holes.

So our economic engagement is in fact dense, and needs to become more engaged as well. Our security problems are real; they are there for us to act on. And then, on the maritime resource itself, the fisheries threats represented to many of the island countries are real and they are growing, and when I look at the impact of illegal fishing on some of the island economies of the Indian Ocean, this is something we have a common responsibility to work on with our partners and friends in the region.

As I draw my remarks to a conclusion, could I also draw the attention of distinguished friends and colleagues around the table to a working paper that India, and ourselves as Australia, as the incoming Chair and Vice-Chair circulated among senior officials in recent days. It outlined five or six concrete areas of future cooperation: maritime security; trade and investment; natural disaster management; technical and scientific cooperation; environmental cooperation as well as fisheries management, and on top of that, tourism, people-to-people links and culture.

Around those initiatives, we in Australia will be putting forward during our deliberations today four or five specific sets of initiatives, which we will support financially through the Australian International Development Agency to give practical effect to these areas of cooperation and I will go into the detail of those later in our deliberations.

My final remark Mr Chair is this. If we as an Indian Ocean institution share these common interests, and we wish to make sure that the Indian Ocean region is supported into the future to be a zone of peace, of prosperity and of cooperation, then I think it's important that we reflect on the importance we attach to the institution in itself. I believe in the future. We need to work to ensure that our officials are working more regularly on our agenda.

That our attendance at meetings such as this becomes increasingly at the foreign minister level across the region and I do not come to this table with clean hands as Australia. This is the first meeting we have attended at foreign minister level in 15 years, so I'm not here to preach a lesson. I'm here to confess sins and then suggest a way forward.

But, on top of that could I suggest this. The name we have given ourselves 15 years ago defies pronunciation in the English language, I'm not sure about French and I'm not sure about the other languages represented around the table as well. I was engaged recently with US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, in a conversation about IOR-ARC and what it does. For the first three minutes she believed I was talking about Baghdad! And with due deference to our good friends in Iraq, that was not the immediate subject of the conversation. This name that we have for ourselves is too long, too cumbersome and too unpronounceable.

If I could make a radical, blunt and characteristically Australian suggestion, which defies all protocol and etiquette, it's that in our deliberations today we should think of a name change. I am completely open to what it is, but it must be pronounceable. I see in today's newspaper, a paper I'd never heard of before - the Deccan Chronicle - it has a very nice picture of my friend and colleague, the Indian Foreign Minister, which recommends the name 'Indian Ocean Community'. I'm very happy with that. 'Indian Ocean Regional Association', IORA, I'm very happy with that. 'Indian Ocean Organisation', I-O-O or I-double-O, I'm very happy with that. The good thing about all three of them is that you can pronounce them!

I think the day that we can pronounce, and understand clearly, what our regional institution is called will be the day we will achieve a great step forward in articulating to our own countries and to the broader international community what we are trying to do in this Indian Ocean region. I am looking forward to that discussion Mr Chairman on whether there's any support for a name change and how we go about doing it.