

Australia's Statement to the Tenth Meeting of the IOR –ARC Council of Ministers

Sana'a, 5 August 2010

Delivered by Ms Deborah Stokes, First Assistant Secretary

South and West Asia and Middle East Division

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

His Excellency, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Yemen, Ministers, Excellencies and distinguished delegates, Australia is pleased to participate in the Tenth Meeting of the Council of Ministers. I represent Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Stephen Smith, who, due to the Federal Election being contested in Australia this month, is unable to attend. Mr Smith conveys his wishes for the success of this meeting.

The Indian Ocean region has assumed greater significance in recent years, globally and to Australia. In December 2007, in his first speech as Foreign Minister, Mr Smith said Australia needed to look west - that is to the Indian Ocean region. This recognises Australia's interests in the security, prosperity and sustainability of the Indian Ocean region. Australia has enhanced its engagement with its Indian Ocean rim neighbours, from the countries of South East Asia, the countries of South Asia, the countries of the Gulf and the countries of Africa.

Australia recognises the leading position IOR-ARC holds as the region's largest grouping and the importance of it functioning as an effective organisation, building closer cooperation between Member States.

Australia wishes to play its part in making a constructive contribution to IOR-ARC. This is why in response to the invitation for nominations, Australia has put itself forward to serve as Vice-Chair from 2011 when India will assume the Chair.

Australia notes that IOR-ARC's Committee of Senior Officials meeting in 2008 recommended that the Council of Ministers look favourably upon candidacies from Member States of South-East Asia and Oceania at the time of the next Vice-Chair vacancy. Were Australia to be endorsed by this meeting as Vice-Chair, we would look forward to supporting and working with the current Chair, Yemen, and the next Chair, India, and other members - as well as the Secretariat - to enhance and further the effectiveness of IOR-ARC activities.

Australia is pleased to endorse the conclusions of the Senior Officials' Meeting and welcomes the improvements to the Charter and Rules of Procedure. Australia wishes to welcome Oman's commitment to the Fisheries Support Unit, an important initiative for

IOR-ARC. We also welcome the decision of Senior Officials to recommend the Indian Ocean Research Group be granted observer status. In that connection we note that the Indian Ocean Group, together with the Indian Council for World Affairs, will convene a conference in New Delhi in April 2011 on the topic of 'Indian Ocean Regionalism: Revitalising IOR-ARC'. We welcome this initiative.

Senior Officials appreciated very much the briefing provided by Yemen on the piracy problem. Given the importance of this issue to most, if not all, member countries, we would see merit in having an exchange of views on piracy at the next Senior Officials' Meeting.

We also welcome the proposal that Senior Officials meet twice a year as this will help to maintain IOR-ARC's momentum throughout the year.

In conclusion, Australia wishes to convey to Yemen our appreciation for its excellent work as Chair of IOR-ARC and for its generous hospitality in hosting this meeting.

Thank you.