

**STATEMENT BY  
MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, DR SHASHI  
THAROOR AT THE PLENARY  
MEETING OF THE NINTH COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF THE  
INDIAN OCEAN RIM-ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL  
COOPERATION (IOR-ARC) SANA'A, YEMEN 25 JUNE 2009**

**Mr. Chairman**

**Honorable Ministers,**

**Distinguished Delegates, Excellencies and Friends:**

At the outset, I would like to thank our hosts, the Government and the People of the Republic of Yemen for the warm hospitality extended to me and the members of my delegation. I would also like to compliment them for the excellent arrangements made for the Conference. It is also my pleasant duty to accept the Vice-Chairmanship of this body on behalf of India. Allow me, Mr. Chairman, to congratulate you Sir, for your contributions as Vice-Chairman till today, and on your assumption of the Chairmanship. I pledge that the Indian delegation and I personally will work under your strong leadership to bring momentum to our Association in the years ahead.

2. Mr. Chairman, allow me to congratulate and thank our colleagues for the tremendous efforts they have made over the last couple of days and the recommendations put forward for our consideration of the substantive agenda items. They have also done a comprehensive review of the status of our cooperation.

3. These meetings have always provided delegations with the opportunity to meet and learn more about each other, about differences as well as our commonalities and are thus important to focus on making faster progress and to give new directions to our cooperation. It helps us to keep track of the vision of the Association and allows us to introspect on whether we are taking steps, however small they may be, towards achieving the goals enshrined in the Charter.

4. I congratulate the Islamic Republic of Iran, the outgoing Chair, and in particular the dynamic Foreign Minister, for the considerable efforts made in making the Association more dynamic and taking it forward under Iran's Chairmanship. The Secretariat has been assiduous and energetic in supporting and implementing the Ministerial decisions. The coordination done by Working Group Meetings of our Heads of Mission in Pretoria has been valuable as it has provided a useful forum for pursuing IOR-ARC matters.

5. I have closely gone through the agenda and I am pleased to see that some of the studies under taken are now acquiring shape as concrete projects. These will certainly serve as building blocks for a solid structure of cooperation in our littoral region. It makes me happy to see that the seeds are being sown for transforming the Association from a declaratory phase to an action oriented phase with Member Countries embarking on cooperative projects. At the same time, Excellencies, we are aware that a great deal more

needs to be done to make the Association realize its true potential. The destinies of our countries are linked in more than one way. Being littoral states of the Indian Ocean is just one of the many threads that bind us. How we are able to weave the threads into a rich tapestry of cooperation is the challenge facing all of us here today. We have some ideas. Our senior officials have offered some suggestions. My own feeling is that the Association has now reached a level of maturity where we need to initiate and implement creative, indeed bold, initiatives. I look forward to discussing some of them today with my esteemed colleagues, and to hearing some of your own ideas. And I thank the distinguished delegation of Singapore for starting the ball rolling just now.

6. One serious proposal to intensify work of the Association is related to the strengthening of the IOR-ARC Secretariat and other associated mechanisms. I agree that the matter needs close examination as only a strong Secretariat can service the ever-increasing demands that we propose to put on it in the near future by our increasing cooperation. It is time for us to review the Charter to meet the needs of an enhanced agenda and growing cooperation. I understand that some views have already been exchanged in this regard by our senior officials. We will discuss this in detail in our deliberations.

7. I am aware that some priority issues related to the working of the Association have been discussed by the Senior Officials. Excellencies, India feels that the time is now ripe that priority areas emerging from the deliberations of the Academic Group, Business Forum and Working Group on Trade and Investment are identified and prioritized. It is our view that sectoral working groups, with members from nodal or line Ministries, should meet at regular intervals with their counterparts. They should draw up Action Plans in priority areas of cooperation and implement them in a time bound-manner.

8. This is particularly required now when the Association is heading towards a project-oriented phase. Such interaction would also generate new ideas and provide the "headquarters" support that is so essential for projects to be meaningfully implemented.

9. There has been a proposal from the Secretariat to set up National Chapters under various forums, i.e. Academic, Business and Trade and Investment. India has already identified its nodal Ministry/ agencies dealing with these Working Groups and would like to continue this practice.

10. I shall, at this stage, not endeavour to go into the details of the issues that will come up for deliberation during the meeting. I am sure we shall have scope for substantive discussions later. Nevertheless, I take this opportunity to mention some initiatives that India proposes to take in the coming months.

11. India invites IOR-ARC Member Countries to participate substantively in the prestigious India International Trade Fair (IITF) held annually in New Delhi, from November 14-27. As you are aware, India has in the past provided free space to some fellow Member States and we are delighted to renew our offer to those Member States.

We also propose to organize a sectoral seminar or a Buyer-Seller Meet on the sidelines of the Trade Fair.

12. An "Annapurna" World of Food India is being organized by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) on 25-26 November 2009 at Mumbai. This is India's largest business-to-business meeting platform for food and beverage industry. We invite all IOR-ARC Members to participate.

13. I am glad to announce the allocation of 34 scholarships from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) for postgraduate studies in India. This will be towards implementation of our offer made last year under the General Agreement agreed to by the University Mobility in the Indian Ocean Region (UMIOR) group and the Academic Group.

14. In our efforts towards strengthening of training, in high-level professional development programmes towards capacity building, I would like to inform you that under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, we have around 200 courses in 43 institutions during 2009-2010. I would invite Member Countries to nominate participants for these courses. As regards the specialized courses offered by us last year, the course relating to "Disaster Risk Management including coastal and marine hazards" is proposed to be held at the Integrated Coastal and Marine Area Management Project Directorate (ICMAM PD), Chennai in late October/early November this year. The specific dates will be circulated shortly.

15. A Specialized Training Course for Foreign Diplomats of the IOR-ARC member countries is being organized by the Foreign Service Institute of the Ministry of External Affairs from 5-16 October 2009. I would urge interested Member Countries to participate in this specialized course as well.

16. Keeping in view the interest shown and the participation by Member Countries in making the First IOR-ARC Film Festival held in India in February 2008 a great success, I am delighted to announce that we propose to hold the Second Film Festival in India in August 2010.

17. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the IOR-ARC Council of Ministers in Muscat, it was decided to continue with the "Chair" of Indian Ocean Rim studies. India and Mauritius, had invited applications for the post. The Selection Committee had in December 2007 selected a suitable person, who however was not offered the position within a time frame that he found acceptable. In view of this, the vacancy has to be circulated again for the selection of another candidate. I propose the formation of a Selection Committee for this purpose. I further propose to Mauritius that to attract the best talent, we suitably revise the emoluments associated with the "Chair".

18. As regards the secondment of a new Director from India to the Secretariat, we regret that there have been some difficulties in the past, but we are now confident of seconding an officer in near future.

19. With regards to the proposal to establish an Open University of Mauritius, I am happy to inform you that the Indira Gandhi National Open University in Delhi would be able to provide suitable support in setting up the Open University in Mauritius.

20. There are three new proposals from India on (i) Agro-Meteorological Advisory Service System for Enhancing Agriculture Output, (ii) Potential Fishing Zone Advisories and (iii) Forecast Demonstration Project for Improving the Track, Intensity, Landfall Prediction and Impact Assessment of Tropical Cyclones affecting the North Indian Ocean Rim Countries, under the Academic Group. We seek the support and cooperation of Member Countries in converting these proposals into tangible projects.

21. I am happy to announce that India offers to lead in the new area for Promoting Cultural Cooperation among IOR-ARC Member Countries and our Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) would be the Coordinator. We look forward to the support and cooperation of Member Countries in this area,

22. Excellencies, I have listed a few of the initiatives that my country will be taking up in the coming months. At the same time I am acutely aware that much more needs to be done by each Member Country so that the Association can acquire a presence in the collective consciousness of our peoples. After all that is what brings us here together. I will be candid here and say that I had to explain to a lot of people what this association is all about, when I announced that my first trip abroad after becoming a Minister would be to attend this Conference. I am confident that we will be able to give a concrete shape and direction to the grouping in such a way that in coming years this Association starts to touch the lives of people living on the shores of the mighty Indian Ocean. Let this meeting be a milestone in the organization's progress in which we make a solemn resolution to fast-track our cooperation.

23. I personally have a great deal of faith in the potential of this organization. I am delighted to see that this organization brings together so many diverse countries at different stages of development coming together tied by a single and unique bond - the neighbourhood of an Ocean. This diversity of interests and capabilities may have so far impeded substantive cooperation, but in this diversity I see the kernels of fruitful cooperation as it opens up immense possibilities of doing whatever suits a group of countries to undertake. Our senior officials have already touched upon two possible new areas of work- tourism and the combat against piracy. I hope we can take these issues back to our capitals to reflect on the substantive content we can give to them. This is undoubtedly a challenge and an opportunity. Let us rise to it so that this Association is seen as a model platform for transcontinental cooperation. We have taken due note of the idea mentioned at the working breakfast to consider making the UN General Assembly session as a deadline for advancing our thoughts on such matters, and we will take this on board as a possible way forward.

24. Mr. Chairman, we look forward to working under your leadership and the leadership of Yemen as Chair of the Association during the next couple of years. Having assumed the onerous responsibility of Vice Chair this year, I would like to convey my assurances to the Chair and all Member Countries that India will do its utmost in the coming years to help energize our organization and to ensure that this Association which

unusually brings together countries of Asia, Africa and Oceania realizes in considerable measure its vision of meaningful cooperation transcending international boundaries.

**Thank you.**