

**STATEMENT BY SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
ZAINUL ABIDIN RASHEED AT INDIAN OCEAN RIM-ASSOCIATION FOR
REGIONAL COOPERATION 9th COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING, 25
JUNE 2009**

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

First, I would like to begin by thanking Yemen as the Chair for the excellent arrangements and warm hospitality that you have extended to all of us since our arrival. For most of my delegation, this is our first visit to Yemen and the warmth and generosity of spirit that we have experienced has made all of us want to return to see more of the wonderful city of Sana'a and the other rich historical sites and culture of Yemen.

We meet here today in interesting times. It has been twelve years since the Indian Ocean Rim-Association for Regional Cooperation was first officially launched in Mauritius in March 1997. Singapore is privileged to have been involved in the IOR-ARC since its inception, with the links that it draws to our historical roots as a trading nation with a long history of economic and trade linkages with the Indian Ocean Rim countries.

The potential afforded by the IOR-ARC cannot be overstated. The diversity of membership among the Indian Ocean littoral states offers vast opportunities for greater economic cooperation, tourism, trade and investment. That said, the sheer geographical spread and diversity of member states also mean that co-operation can only proceed at a pace that is comfortable and compatible with the various interests of individual members states. After all, twelve years is not a long time to build up mutual confidence and understanding, or to put in place the mechanisms to advance the economic goals and interaction that we set out for ourselves. In order for the Association to be bigger than the sum of our parts, we need to continue to forge and identify what our commonality of interests are, and have the discipline to focus on what these are in order to move things forward. Thus far, the formation of the IOR-ARC Academic Group, the Business Forum and the Trade and Investment Working Group are steps in the right direction. At the same time, we need to guard against over institutionalizing the platforms. We need to continually review the mechanisms, resist the temptation to proliferate issues, and if necessary, re-set the agenda in order to encourage even greater interaction and co-operation. The more focused we can be, the more progress we can forge and in this respect, the funds and support from the various member states will naturally come.

As a small country, Singapore is committed to playing a constructive and meaningful role in the IOR-ARC. In this regard, we would like to invite member states to take advantage of and participate in our Singapore Cooperation Programme, where we provide technical assistance in a wide range of areas from information technology, to tourism, port management and urban development, to public administration, law and governance. To date, Singapore has hosted some 12, 900 SCP participants from the various IOR-ARC states. At the same time, to meet the increasing demand for technical

assistance and collaboration, we have set up the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise to provide customized solutions built around our developmental expertise and offered on a cost-recovery basis for countries that would like to avail themselves of this alternative route. We are happy to work with member states to see how both of these programs could be extended to member states as part of our commitment to the IOR-ARC.