

**Statement of Ambassador M Fazlul Karim at the 9th Council of
Ministers Meeting in Sana'a, Yemen, 25 June, 2009**

Mr. Chairman,
Hon'ble Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentleman,

Let me at the outset convey my delegations deepest condolences at the sudden demise of our good friend and colleague Ambassador Marleen of Sri Lanka who came to Sana'a from Riyadh to lead his country's delegation to the Senior Officials meeting of IOR-ARC.

Mr. Chairman,

I feel privileged and honored to be able to speak at this august gathering at the historic city of Sana'a. I take the opportunity to convey the greetings of the Hon'ble Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni to you all. She regrets that she could not attend this conference due to her prior commitments.

I extend my delegation's warmest felicitations to you, Mr. Chairman, on your election and I am confident that under your able stewardship we would have a very productive and successful meeting. I thank the Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Iran for very ably leading our Group for last three years.

We are grateful to the government of Yemen for the warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements for the conference.

Mr. Chairman,

Our meeting is taking place at a critical juncture. The economies of most of our countries are facing serious challenges from the global economic recession. Many of our socio-economic development programmes may not see the light of the day as a result of slowing down of exports and dwindling of investment. The worrying thing is that there is not yet any sign of recovery from the global economic downturn. Many of our countries are also facing existential threats from the effects of global warming and climate change.

Against such a backdrop, the 9th Council of Ministers meeting of IOR-ARC assumes special significance. The strength of our Association lies in its diversity. We must build a strong partnership to sail through these tumultuous times smoothly.

We hope that through the expansion of collaborative projects and programmes, our Association would be able to make a difference in the lives of millions. We have to move forward by taking concrete actions in integrating our economies and facing the challenges of poverty and environmental degradation together.

Distinguished delegates,

More than a decade had passed since our organization was formally launched. During the past years we have approved many projects on fisheries, tourism, natural disaster mitigation, promotion of trade, etc. However, many of the projects remain in cold storage. It is therefore time to prioritize and focus on areas which would do greater good to our peoples. Let us resolve to make the coming decade as the decade of implementation of the decisions of IOR-ARC.

Our region is endowed with immense human and natural resources which need to be utilized for the benefit of our peoples. The business community of our countries must come forward with innovative projects especially for the development of the less developed areas of the region. We need to build a strong Public-Private partnership to move our cooperation forward. The Business Forum of IOR-ARC has a special responsibility and it should focus on key areas of economic cooperation. The Academic Group which is doing a commendable job needs to pay more attention to areas like transfer of technology, climate change and tourism.

Mr. Chairman,

The Indian Ocean is the lifeline of international trade. It carries half of the world's container ships, one-third of the bulk cargo and two-thirds of the world's oil shipments. With its two billion people, the Indian Ocean Rim region is an attractive area for foreign direct investment.

The Indian Ocean Rim region can become a powerful bloc if we can realize higher level of economic integration and expand cultural cooperation. We feel that this can be achieved by establishing a preferential trade regime, promoting intra-IOR investment and facilitating cultural exchange programmes.

Mr. Chairman,

We envisage IOR-ARC as a vibrant and effective organization that embodies the hopes and aspirations of the peoples of our region. We want to see it gain more visibility and strength in the days to come. Bangladesh would bring its meaningful contribution to that end.

I thank you.