

Mr Masakazu Toshikage, Ambassador Sana'a

**Your Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Government of Japan, I should like to congratulate the Member Governments and Secretariat of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation for a series of useful and constructive discussions taking place at various levels during the week. I also wish to pay tribute to the Yemeni Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its commendable efforts to host this Ninth Meeting of Council of Ministers here in a Sana'a.

As a dialogue partner, the Japanese Government has been participating in the meetings of Council of Ministers since its second meeting in Mozambique in March 1999, and ever since has been following with keen interest discussions on ways and means to strengthen regional cooperation in a variety of areas including trade and investment, science and technology, the environment and natural disasters, and maritime security. The Japanese Government will continue to do so, in the light of very friendly and cooperative relations it has nurtured over the years with the Indian Ocean Rim Association and each one of its Member Governments and dialogue partners.

Let me conclude my brief remarks by wishing you all a successful conclusion of this Council of Ministers Meeting later this afternoon which, I am confident, will mark another major step forward in the development of regional cooperation in many areas of vital importance to the whole region. Thank you.