

## **Statement by**

### **Minister of Foreign Affairs of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Hon Rohitha Bogollagama**

His Excellency Mr. Manouchehr Mottaki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran & Chairperson of IOR-ARC

Distinguished Colleagues,

Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to begin, by extending my congratulations to the Islamic Republic of Iran as Chair of IOR-ARC for successfully directing the course of our Association, over the past three years. Mr Chairman, your dedication to the work of the Association, and continued interest in its progress, is indeed heartening. I take this opportunity to convey the warm felicitations of my colleague the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka, Hon Rohitha Bogollagama and his sincere wishes for a successful outcome to this Meeting.

I wish to thank Iran for the warm welcome and generous hospitality accorded to me, and my delegation. The close interaction that our two countries share was enhanced with the State visit of H.E. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Sri Lanka last week.

Sri Lanka has maintained a keen interest in the work of IOR-ARC<sup>^</sup> having hosted two of the Council sessions and one of our countrymen serving as the Executive Director of the Association. We are therefore deeply committed to the work of IOR-ARC and interested in seeing it develop into a successful regional integration effort. I wish to take this opportunity to share with you some thoughts on the future direction of IOR-ARC as Sri Lanka perceives it.

Several significant steps have been taken under the able Chairmanship of Iran and we are seeing, the culmination of these steps today. The strengthening of institutional mechanisms that has been done in the past three years is crucial for the future of the organization.

The Working Group of IOR-ARC Heads of Mission, has met, three times and held an Extra Ordinary Meeting during the past year in South Africa. They have deliberated among others, on two key issues, namely, the functioning of the IOR-ARC Special Fund and the Action Plan of the Association. These ideas have developed to the extent, that we have before us an opportunity to finalise matters related to them. Particular attention, should also be given to putting in place within our own respective national systems, and mechanisms to monitor the progress of activities undertaken by each member country and as a group collectively. The proposal to establish a tripartite IOR-ARC National Focal Points Committees in each member state, therefore, must be looked at carefully. I am happy to note that, there is, agreement among member countries on the need for a realistic Action Plan to streamline the activities of the Association.

Our intention to adopt the “principle of clustering” (four plus one countries) and of being more project driven are two proposals, that have developed considerably since being proposed at the session in Colombo. The institutionalization of the Troika with authority to decide on matters of urgency in between Council Meetings has also proved to be useful in dealing with administrative matters of the Association.

Mr Chairman,

You would agree however, that much more remains to be done. Any organization, as it enters its second decade in existence must consider in some detail the progress that has been made. You would recall that

the purpose of establishing this Association was mainly to foster economic cooperation and integration among member countries. It was also formed to ensure that the benefits of globalization and liberalization, would be reaped by all the member countries. Time and money are being invested by member countries, for the upkeep of the Association in the belief, that the benefits of this exercise would accrue to the peoples of the member states.

Mr Chairman,

Permit me to bring to your attention an extract from the remarks made by the late Hon Lakshman Kadirgamar, the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka who chaired the Council of Ministers' session in Colombo, in 2004. They are important to reflect upon, as they underline the importance of the political will. and commitment of member states in making this endeavour successful

I quote

“This organization belongs to the member States. They have built a valuable structure for cooperation with the inclusion of the academic and business communities. If the organization falters or fails, it will be because the member States had by default, let that happen.

Let us be frank with ourselves. Either the organization is worth preserving, in which case it is worth promoting and sustaining, or it must be allowed to wither away and die.”

Unquote

You would agree that no organization can move forward meaningfully, without consistent political support from member countries. We must display a constant commitment to the process. Sri Lanka believes that this commitment must be demonstrated consistently if IOR-ARC is to become a success.

I wish to thank you Mr. Chairman, for leading our sessions to a successful conclusion. Special mention must also be made of South Africa which has hosted the Working Group Meetings of Heads of Mission and Mauritius.

Last but not least, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the untiring efforts of the outgoing Executive Director Mr T Z A Samsudeen, in pushing forward the agenda of IOR-ARC, during his tenure.

I thank you.