

STATEMENT BY
MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, HIS EXCELLENCY SHRI. E. AHAMED
Ministry of External Affairs MER Division

REPUBLIC OF INDIA

8TH MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF IOR-ARC, IRAN, TEHRAN

4 MAY2008

Mr. Chairman

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished Delegates

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your warm words of welcome and convey my deep appreciation to the Government and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the gracious hospitality extended to me and the members of my delegation and for the excellent arrangements made for our meeting here. It is indeed a pleasure to be among friends.

2. I would like to thank our colleagues for the strenuous efforts they have made over the last few days to prepare ground for this meeting. The recommendations they have made for our consideration are practical and result oriented. New strategies have been devised to carry forward our common vision for mutually beneficial cooperation. Though a 10 year life would have justified a Summit in normal circumstances, here it is premature to think of a Summit. We need to have a certain direction and consolidation first.

3. In the past on year, I find a candid review and appreciation of the ground realities of one decade of IOR-ARC's existence has been made. It needs to be provided greater substance. There needs to be concrete shape and direction given to the grouping.

4. We are a diverse group of countries, coming from different geographical locations, different levels of economic development and belonging to different regional groupings. But then we have in common the Indian Ocean that sustains the maritime lifeline of over 50% of world trade and binds us together. We value the forum of IOR-ARC and attach importance to its potential. It is important to think ahead and have a long-term vision for the future of our cooperation.

5. I wish to ple on record my delegation's high appreciation for the generous financial contribution Mauritius has made in the running of the Coordinating Secretariat at Port Louis and the performance of the Executive Director, Ambassador T Z A Samsudeen, in running the affairs of the Secretariat. The 3-4 year Action Plan prepared by the Secretariat is very exhaustive and I am sure a lot of thought and effort has gone into it. I would at the same time appreciate the Working Group Meetings of our Heads of Mission in South Africa which has facilitated in providing a forum for pursuing IOR-ARC matters.

6. I shall, at this stage, not go into the details of the issues that would come up for deliberation during the meeting. I am sure we shall have scope for substantive discussions later.

7. I feel our concerted efforts to make the grouping active would be successful when we come up with tangible proposals based on our complementarities and common goals. In this context, I would like to

mention that only those project which can be sustained and would add value and are unique to this grouping, should be taken up and moved actively forward.

8. To achieve this goal, it is important that sectoral working groups/ with countries opting to lead in specific sectors, should be established over and above the Academic Group, Business Forum and Trade and Investment Working Groups concurrently functioning. The studies or projects that have already been identified and are likely to continue may be brought under the respective sectoral groupings 'for better coordination. These sectoral working groups should report to our Senior Officials. This would be in addition to the meetings of the Heads of Missions in Pretoria. The studies or proposals which are more than ten years old and have not translated into viable projects should be scrapped with the consent of the member country.

9. Areas of common interest that are binding the Indian Ocean Rim countries, such as ocean bed exploration, hydrographic survey, disaster management and information sharing, shipping, coastal infrastructure, fisheries, weather forecasting should be given priority. I am aware that the prime focus of this grouping is developing trade and economic cooperation. But there are other foCa in which member countries are engaged in trade and economic facilitation and engagement. Our idea should be not to duplicate those efforts but bring on board in their grouping projects which are unique to such an organization and which will be sustainable and have a larger footprint in the region. An expert group of officers from Foreign Ministries and nodal Ministries of member countries should meet at least twice before the next Ministerial meeting to identify areas, develop concrete projects and give directions to move forward. The Executive Director of the Secretariat has a very vital role in implementing the ideas into successful cooperation of IOR-ARC countries.

10. I am happy to reiterate the announcement made by my Prime Minister during the recently held India-Africa Summit in New Delhi in April 2008, to extend Duty Free Tariff Preferences Scheme for Least Developed Countries which gets extended to some of the IOR-ARC member countries as well.

11. I would like to thank IOR-ARC member countries for making the First IOR-ARC Film Festival, organised by my Ministry in partnership with Directorate of Film Festivals, in New Delhi in February-March this year, a great success. Ten films were screened at the Film Festival with the participation of Australia, Bangladesh, Iran, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and India. The Directors of the Australian and Tanzanian Films participated in the inaugural and closing ceremonies and discussed possibilities of co-production of films with their Indian counterparts. In this connection, I would like to propose that IOR-ARC Film Festivals may be organized biannually which will bring together the talents of member countries and provide a platform for sharing of resources and cultures and eventually lead to joint production of films and marketing in the region. We would be happy to host the festival in different cities of India.

12. We appreciate the participation of IOR-ARC Member Countries, at the India International Trade Fair 2007 in November 2007. A Buyer-Seller Meet was also organized. I am glad that Mr. Samsuddin visited the Trade Fair and attended the closing ceremony of the Fair. I would appreciate if all the IOR-ARC member countries participate in IITF 2008 and make the event more successful by a much larger participation so that a dedicated IOR-ARC pavilion could be allotted. We once again offer 3 x 3 sq. mt. stalls free of cost to fellow developing countries, Bangladesh, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania and Yemen.

13. Continuing with our efforts for strengthening of training, in high-level professional development programmes towards capacity building, I am glad to announce that specialised training courses have been designed keeping in view the commonality of this grouping, in the areas of "Disaster Risk Management including coastal and marine hazards", a Workshop-cum-training on "Maritime Cooperation among IOR-ARC countries" and Special Course on "Auditing in Information Technology Environment" under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme. Under the General Agreement agreed to by the UMIOR and Academic Group, wherein funding for 2 students per member country by respective countries has been proposed, we are glad to offer, in the first year of its implementation, a total of 36 scholarships under the Indian council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) for postgraduate studies in India.

14. We appreciate the request received from the IOR-ARC Secretariat to train its staff on IORNET. In this connection, I am glad to announce that we shall offer training for Secretariat staff under the ITEC Programme as well as training on IORNET with FICCI.

15. A Specialized Training Course for Foreign Diplomats for IOR-ARC member countries is being organized by the Foreign Service Institute of the Ministry of External Affairs, the details of which will be conveyed to the Secretariat in due course.

16. Mr. Chairman, you would agree with me that people-to- people interaction should play a vital role in making our grouping more vibrant. We should think of initiating activities which can give better visibility to our grouping in our own countries and beyond.

17. IOR-ARC established a "Chair" on Indian Ocean Studies since 1997. The interviews for selection to the post have been held by a Selection Committee from India and Mauritius. I am happy to learn that Prof. P.V. Rao, an eminent Professor from Osmania University, Hyderabad, India, has been selected for the post. I am sure, once the "Chair" is in place, the course of direction for identifying projects enhancing cooperation would be better addressed. Here I would like to stress upon the role which the Executive Director could play, in driving the organization forward. Therefore, the selection of the new Executive Director has to be diligently done involving all member countries in the process.

18. I am confident that we would be able to give a concrete shape and direction to the grouping. Let the meeting be a milestone in the organization's progress. Before I conclude, let me express Mr. Chairman, my delegation's full support and our commitment for the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation for mutual benefit of all our peoples so that we succeed in our efforts to translate our ideas into beneficial cooperation for peace, progress and prosperity of the region.

Thank you.
