

Country Statement by the Leader of the Sri Lanka, Delegation, H.E. A.H.M Fowzie
6th Council of Ministers Meeting
21st and 22nd February 2006
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Hon Ministers, Excellencies,

I would like to warmly congratulate the Hon Manuchehr Mottaki, on his assumption of office as the Chair of the 6th Council of Ministers Meeting of the IOR-ARC. We have richly benefited from the Chairman's statement in which he has outlined his vision for the future direction of our Association. Each Council of Ministers Meeting contributes its special character, as indeed Tehran will. It is the collective potential of the Member States, that IOR-ARC has been instituted to develop.

I request for your kind indulgence to briefly recall the devastation and loss of life brought upon on several of our member countries including my own, by the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 26, 2004. The disaster was of such magnitude that it claimed over 232,000 human lives. It left in its wake death and destruction. I wish to take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge the support extended in the form of emergency relief supplies and financial contributions received from all the Member States of the IOR-ARC Governments and the public of member states responded magnificently and in the spirit of neighbourliness and humanity. Although this disaster succeeded in inflicting physical damage and destruction it helped the world at large to rekindle the spirit of humanness by extending support and sustenance at a level that Indian Ocean countries are yet to see. It is our credit that we were able to keep alive human values in times of dire need.

The readiness of Member States to share information on early warnings on a real time basis among the neighboring Member States indeed is commendable. I admire their desire to activate networking arrangements and sharing of information on websites. These for me are a display of the obvious signs of foundations for future achievements and a proof of keenness of the Member States to foster the objectives of the Association.

Excellencies, may I now draw your attention to pay a tribute to my colleague, the late Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, who adorned this Chair during our last meeting. He steered our discussions and provided astute leadership and visionary guidance towards charting a course for the membership towards reaching the objectives of the IOR-ARC. This was until his brutal assassination last August moaned by one and all in the international community. My late colleague played an important and key role in the affairs of this Council and his contribution towards evolving and determining the principle of clustering for the Association, a mechanism to allow a smaller number of Member States among the membership to get another and work our projects, will remain in lasting testimony of him.

It must be acknowledged that IOR-ARC remains one of the youngest regional organizations with a ten-year history. IOR-ARC, nurtured by members with noble and great expectations, is now embarking on an important phase of institutional development, where the membership will pragmatically begin to strengthen the Secretariat. A perceptible sign of this pragmatism is the desire to own up the Secretariat. A tribute from all of us here is owed to the Republic of Mauritius which during the last nine years bore the burden of the responsibility of meeting the salaries of the general staff of the secretariat and that of the executive head of the secretariat. I am certain that all my colleagues in the council will join me in recognizing the great service of Mauritius, to our Association.

I wish to end with a few thoughts from my late colleague Hon Lakshman Kadirgamar who at the inauguration discerned seven strands of thought on the formation of IOR-ARC as enunciated by the founders at the first Ministerial in Mauritius. I thought it fitting to revisit those reasons, which are still very relevant today.

- It could be said that IOR-ARC is a revival of historical trading ties in response to the challenge of modern economic imperatives
- Regional cooperation is seen as an effective response to the challenges posed by the globalization of world trade
- While disparate in terms of size, population, resources and development of the rim States and the absence of contiguity, a range of complementarities exist which can be tapped. It is argued that one good way to maximize these complementarities was to explore areas of cooperation not undertaken elsewhere
- Although members of IOR-ARC already belonged to other regional blocks such as ASEAN, SAARC, A=and SADEC, overlapping membership of this nature was not seen as an obstruction to or a distraction from the implementation of IOR-ARC activities, but rather a welcome source of enrichment in terms of ideas and experience.
- The imaginative and innovative composition of the IOR-ARC structure-that is to say, government, the business communities and the academic communities working together was seen as a source of special strength in the increasingly interdependent modern world.
- Some suggested that IOR-ARC should proceed slowly at a measured pace
- It was agreed that the IOR-ARC Secretariat should start small and develop incrementally as the organization generates a work programme that warrants a larger secretariat.

If, however, on the whole, the pace of regional cooperation has slackened, it is up to us, the Heads of Delegation to the Council of Ministers Meeting to give fresh impetus, to give direction where there has been deviation and to urge action where there has been inaction.

May I therefore suggest, in order to increase the visibility of this Association that we declare the year 2007 as the IOR-ARC Year of Tourism. You would recall that we celebrate 10 years in existence in 2007.

We look forward to you, Mr. Chairman, to guide the destiny of the IOR-ARC, so that the shared potential of the Indian Ocean Rim, can through serious effort, be collectively developed to benefit all our people.

Thank You.