

12th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of IORARC Gurgaon Communiqué

IORARC at 15 – The Next Decade

We, the Ministers of Member States of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC), met at Gurgaon, India, for the 12th Meeting of the Council of Ministers on 2nd November 2012. Our meeting was held in an environment marked by warmth, cordiality and openness.

2. Our meeting followed the 14th meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials, the 18th meeting of the IOR Academic Group, the 12th meeting of the Working Group on Trade & Investment and the 18th meeting of the IOR Business Forum. Their recommendations enriched our agenda and supported our work.

3. We thank the Committee of Senior Officials and all those involved in the three forums for their efforts. We also appreciate the hard work put in by the Secretary General and his team and their commitment to furthering the activities of the Association.

4. Our Association turned 15 this year. Set up in 1997 with the primary objective of promoting “sustained growth and balanced development of the region and of its Member States, and create common ground for regional economic co-operation”, IORARC is the apex pan-Indian Ocean multilateral forum with its membership open to all sovereign States of the Indian Ocean rim that adhere to the principles and objectives of its Charter. Over the years, IORARC has helped build and expand understanding and mutually beneficial cooperation, and facilitated the creation of a regional climate conducive to peace and prosperity.

5. We feel that the time has come now for IORARC to take the necessary steps, through an inclusive approach and in conformity with its Charter, to

strengthen its institutions and enhance their capabilities, to play its due role as the apex organization in the Indian Ocean region that can effectively deliver on issues of contemporary relevance to its Members.

6. At our last meeting in Bengaluru in November 2011, we had identified six priority areas for our cooperation agenda, *maritime security and piracy, disaster risk reduction, trade & investment facilitation, fisheries management, academic and S&T cooperation, and tourism and cultural exchanges*. We believe that the outcome of the Bengaluru meeting has helped bring greater focus on our Association's work. We are pleased to note that a number of useful cooperation initiatives have since been and are being taken in each of these priority areas.

7. The geo-strategic importance of the Indian Ocean cannot be underestimated. Its stability and well-being are critical for global economic prosperity, and even more so for the countries on its Rim. We are convinced that we can augment our capacities to deal with our common challenges in a more effective manner by forging enduring partnerships amongst ourselves. We support closer interaction between our Association and regional organizations in the Indian Ocean, such as the African Union.

8. Piracy is an increasingly serious concern, posing a threat to maritime commerce and the safety of sea farers, making insurance costlier and adding to the costs incurred by the shipping industry in the Indian Ocean Region. Weak governance and instability in parts of the region have contributed to its degeneration into transnational organized crime. We welcome the emphasis that our Association has placed on cooperation in maritime security issues in the Indian Ocean and reaffirm the importance of maintaining freedom of navigation and safety and security of Sea Lanes of Communication in the Indian Ocean.

9. We note that several useful regional and multilateral initiatives to deliberate on various relevant aspects of the fight against piracy have been taken in the Indian Ocean region, and IORARC should consider ways of engaging

with these where feasible and complementing each other's efforts. We would like the IORARC seminar on maritime security scheduled for 2013 to consider concrete proposals of cooperation in this broad area, including institutionalization of a regional mechanism for continuing exchange of views and monitoring of the situation.

10. We believe that IORARC offers a useful platform for exchanging information on white shipping, and developing legislative frameworks and sharing best practices in coastal security and regulation of fishing activities in coastal waters.

11. We underscore the importance of better preparedness to fight natural and other disasters in our maritime domain. Cooperation in search and rescue and training in oil spill response are relevant areas for IORARC. We also acknowledge the need to develop cooperation among our agencies concerned to evolve regional disaster management strategies and operational processes.

12. Several Member States have experienced rapid economic growth. IORARC should consider ways to utilize this economic potential, including that offered by blue economy, for increased intra- and inter-regional trade for the benefit of all member states. While reiterating our commitment to free trade, we see trade facilitation measures as an important dimension in the context of regional trade and investment expansion. In this regard, we welcome the regional workshops on Customs harmonization and Trade Policy held this year as potentially contributing to ease of business, and direct the Working Group on Trade and Investment to take these initiatives forward.

13. The connectivity provided by the Indian Ocean has played an important part in our shared history and will continue to shape our collective destiny. Enhanced connectivity can have a catalytic effect on economic integration by drastically reducing the costs of doing business, and we must find ways of enhancing regional connectivity to realize the full potential of economic cooperation in our region.

14. In this context, development of port and harbour infrastructure in the region assumes critical importance. We direct the Working Group on Trade and Investment to explore the potential of cooperation in this sector, including investment in and upgradation of shipping infrastructure and logistic chains in the region. This would act as an economic multiplier, facilitating growth in individual rim economies.

15. We emphasize the need of building human connectivity through deepening cultural cooperation and promoting tourism in the region which is marked by diversity in social and cultural values.

16. IORARC has developed valuable assets in the form of institutions, such as the Fisheries Support Unit, Maritime Transport Council and Regional Centre for Science and Technology Transfer. We welcome the activities undertaken by them in relevant priority areas on our agenda. We would like these institutions to develop into nodal centres of excellence and to network with other institutions in their respective fields in the region.

17. We attach high importance to our cooperation in the academic and S&T area. The IOR Academic Group should continue to pursue well-thought out initiatives of relevance to our region and member states, implement them in a timely manner, and consider possibilities of promoting exchanges of scholars and scientific and technical experts in this context. We encourage studies on areas of contemporary and regional significance for member States such as climate change, marine biology, coastal management, capacity building in ICT, analysis in investment promotion, etc. We express our appreciation at the successful hosting of IORARC programmes such as the meeting of Heads of National Archives and the mobile Exhibition of Archival material, and the workshop on Multidisciplinary Oceanographic Observations for Coastal Zone Management in India and encourage institutions in our region to develop an agenda for cooperation for action in these and other relevant subjects. We

encourage member States to participate in different programmes organized under the Association.

18. We emphasize the important role that the IORARC Troika can play in coordinating cooperation through regular interaction amongst its members. We also recognize the need to strengthen the IORARC Secretariat and enhance its capabilities to support the activities of our Association.

19. We welcome the simplified procedures for utilization of the IORARC Special Fund and encourage all members to contribute to and make use of the Special Fund of IORARC for effective implementation of programmes in priority areas of the Association.

20. We welcome the Union of Comoros as the 20th member of our Association. We have also decided to admit the United States of America as the 6th Dialogue Partner of IORARC.

21. We thank the Minister of External Affairs of the Republic of India for the warm hospitality extended to us and our delegations and making excellent arrangements for hosting the 12th Council of Ministers and other meetings at Gurgaon. We look forward to continuing our engagement and meeting in Australia in 2013.

Gurgaon, India
2 November 2012