

**IOR-ARC FIRST MINISTERIE; MEETING  
MARCH 1997**

**STATEMENT BY HON. V. BUNWAREE  
MINISTER OF FINANCE  
LEADER OF MAURITIUS DELEGATION**

**Mr. Chairman  
Honourable Ministers  
Excellencies  
Distinguished Delegates  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is indeed a honour and a privilege for me to associate myself with you, Mr. Chairman, to extend once again a warm welcome to my colleague Ministers, and members of their delegations to the First Ministerial Meeting of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish them all a pleasant stay in Mauritius.

**Mr. Chairman**

2. With your wide experience and knowledge of international affairs and regional cooperation, my delegation has no doubt that you will steer this historic meeting to a successful conclusion. In this respect, I can already assure you of full support of the Mauritius delegation.

**Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

3. The conceptualisation of the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative which started in this very Conference Centre two years ago with the holding of the First Inter-governmental Meeting will to-day see its official concretisation with the launching of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation. This is a moment of great pride and joy for Mauritius and for all of us. I would therefore like to take this opportunity, to extend on behalf of Mauritius, our deep appreciation for the strong and unwavering support that all of you have so generously provided in making this endeavour a success.

**Mr. Chairman**

4. The adoption of the Charter, which formally launches the IOR-ARC, is an important turning point in the history of cooperation among the countries of the Indian Ocean Rim. The very fact that fourteen countries are assembled here today, at Ministerial level, is testimony to our political commitment to the Organisation. For Mauritius this is an act of faith because we are committed to regional cooperation. In fact, Mauritius, like most of your countries, already belongs to a number of existing sub-

regional groups. We consider the IOR-ARC as being complementary to these organisations and a useful mechanism to enable our countries to better integrate the world economic and trading system.

5. Our intention of building co-operation on a wider geographical scale is motivated by the desire to achieve a sizeable and durable economic space. This space or alliance is more than ever possible and plausible now with the manifestation of goodwill and cooperative spirit based on shared ideals and a common commitment. It is a combination of all these factors common to us all which have forged our way to the first Ministerial Meeting.

6. Mauritius subscribes fully to the principles enshrined in the Charter specially when it states:

*I quote “.....In a spirit of multilateralism, the Association seeks to build and expand understanding and mutually beneficial cooperation through a consensus-based, evolutionary and non-intrusive approach” End of quote.*

This principle is fundamental if we are to be successful in community building based on a vision of peace, stability and happiness for our peoples. The agreement reached by our senior officials on the coordinating mechanism and future administrative arrangement is a concrete example of how we can transcend immediate national priorities in favour of the long-term collective interest of our Association. And this augurs well for the future. Mauritius has a vision for the future of the Association which must match its ambition to enrich the lives and improve the standards of livings of the 1.5 billion of the countries of the region on a sustainable basis.

7. We will need to realize, Mr. Chairman, the confidence which this large segment of the world population forming part of IOR-ARC has placed in us. We, therefore, have no moral right to disappoint them. The important issues, which we are debating here today, will have direct repercussions on their future. We should not therefore underestimate the importance of our responsibilities in this solemn moment of our history.

**Mr. Chairman**  
**Ladies and Gentlemen**

8. The conclusion of the GATT Uruguay Round of trade talks has created new challenges and opportunities, which can best be served by collective regional actions. It is not by mere coincidence that countries in other parts of the world have decided to create strategic economic alliances like the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), etc to better face the emerging challenges as the dawn of the third millennium.

9. Moreover, the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) has created a new international trade and economic paradigm characterised by fierce

competition and free market economy. In this new environment countries have to adapt if they are to achieve sustainable socio-economic development. In this context, the creation of the IOR-ARC is a most welcome and positive development, which comes at an opportune time. We believe that collectively we have the resources and the resilience to better achieve our national goals through the process of cooperation we are today embarking upon.

**Mr. Chairman**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

10. The creation of IOR-ARC is a well-inspired voluntary move towards the filling of a long-felt need for cooperation in the Rim. This has necessitated some time but we are reassured as this has allowed us to draw on the past experiences of other regional groupings, their successes and their failures. We have deliberately adopted a cautious but dynamic and pragmatic approach in the initial stage with the hope of making a quantum leap forward in the future. In this respect, we believe that, as the Association consolidates itself, it may consider at the appropriate time to take on board other interested countries on the basis of the principles enshrined in the Charter.

11. By involving the business community and the academia right from the beginning, we have decided to place the IOR-ARC on a sound and result-oriented perspective. We believe that this process would be encouraged by the active role of Governments as a facilitator and catalyst by creating an enabling and conducive environment for the economic operators. It is encouraging to note that this approach has already borne its fruit judging from the work programme which has been produced by the stakeholders and submitted for our Council's consideration.

12. My delegation is happy to note that the work programme is based on the principle of solidarity with the end result being the improvement in the standard of living of our peoples. We need, therefore, to do everything possible, through our active participation to ensure the effective and timely implementation of the programme. We should not allow any structural and administrative obstacles to hamper the smooth development of our Organization. It may otherwise adversely affect its credibility and effectiveness. And this is not in the interest of anyone of us. The time now is for action and we need show result if we want to maintain the momentum and enthusiasm generated by the launching of the IOR-ARC today.

**Mr. Chairman**

**Distinguished Delegates**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

13. It is no secret that relations in one form or another existed between our countries for centuries. In the forging of these relations, Mauritius played an important role so much so that it came to be known as the *star and key of the Indian Ocean*. And it is still the motto of Mauritius. So let us resolve together, on this auspicious occasion, to make the IOR-ARC a shining star in regional economic cooperation and integration.

I thank you.