

**Sultanate of Oman**

**Ministry of Commerce & Industry**

**Inaugural Remarks by Chair of panel**

**Dr. Ali Masoud Al-Sunaidy**

**Minister of Commerce & Industry, Sultanate of Oman**

**IOR-ARC Conference, 4 July, 2013 Mauritius**

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to be in this beautiful Mauritius and to address such distinguished audience at the Economic and Business Conference of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC).

At times like these, when some may question the values of global coherence, one would like to think that regional integration becomes much more feasible and that it is of much greater importance than any other time before. That is not to say we should lose faith in the old doctrine of 'globalization' or its global trade facilitation tools. After all, many small economies and emerging markets have benefitted from global-trade opportunities and continue to do so through access to larger markets, job creation and transfer of technology.

However, in recent years such 'wisdom' of market opening has been increasingly challenged by socio-economic pressures due to financial crises, natural resource depletion and growing numbers of the unemployed especially in the more matured markets. And like many advocates of economic expansion through market.

Opening, we would like to believe that protectionism is a temporary phenomenon and that mankind will be able to reinvent and add value over and over again and that competition would prevail at the end.

Meanwhile, the 'Do Nothing Option' is not an option. It is therefore at times like these, when nations find themselves looking once again much closer into closer into more regional integration and the members of the IOR should be no exception. So we must look once into our Association and its Charter and ask ourselves; Can we add more values to our products and services by means of more interlinks and complementarity between our markets? Are there opportunities that we have missed as individual countries that may otherwise be realized at a regional-level? How could individual comparative advantages sum up in order to produce a lower cost product or deliver a much higher value for money service as a region?

More specific to this first session of our two-day Conference, we could elaborate on issues of ICT; There is a big potential for content management, virtual education, training and distant learning. With many languages spoken within this region, surely there is potential for knowledge sharing while translation and editing –for example – becomes rewarding business activities.

Tourism is another example for complementarity and not competition. The diversity of weather and nature within the IOR Member States provide for endless opportunities for joint investments and packages among our hotels, tour operators and airliners.

Similarly, the financial sector can also benefit from such collaborative and trade facilitation spirit. Look for example at the products of Islamic Banking, while such products have almost matured in some member countries of our Association, there are very new or non-existent in others.

Other areas for synergy are related to maritime and Ocean economy. The Indian Ocean which the Association draws its name from provides for endless opportunities for jointly funded research and knowledge transfer in areas of environmental protection measures, water desalination, water from sustainable designing etc.

In general, this Association can play an essential role in order to reach new levels of sustainable growth through more market integration, joint investments, knowledge sharing and the transfer of know-how in a business environment that must be made more private-sector enabling. In fact, the sub-regional economic groups in our broader IOR region have already established good grounds in this regard. And while working towards the realization of more intra-regional linkages, the IOR-ARC would need to gain its credibility by executing some doable programs in the already identified areas of cooperation like food security, investment, trade, tourism and ICT. By working much closer and networking, we can raise efficiency, optimize the use of our natural resources and create more jobs.

However, such intra-regional coordination and complementarity need not to suggest by any means that the Association limits its discussions to intra-regional trade issues. In the contrary, the IOR region would still need to be outward looking while benefits of further regional economic expansion and integration can be shared with our world-wide trading partners as they continue to be the trusted providers of innovation and technology, and on the other hand, such matured markets remain to be attracted to this region's competitive products and services.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The Sultanate of Oman, being one of the pioneering founders, has continuously been an enthusiastic promoter of the Association Charter and would also contribute to and benefit from such regional integration especially with relation to knowledge-sharing and exploring maritime related opportunities. In the last few years, Oman has introduced to the region three more major ports facing the Sea of Oman, the Arabian sea and the Indian Ocean and with its unique geographical location, the Sultanate of Oman offers to contribute

to the further socio-economic growth of the IOR. Needless to say that the free economic zones in Sohar, Salalah, and Duqum can complement zones in the IOR region in order to boost trade and joint investments.

Before closing, please allow me to convey our gratitude to the Government and people of Mauritius for the warm welcome and excellent facilities extended to this Conference, wishing you all a good stay and very meaningful discussions.

Thank you