

Opening Remarks by Secretary General of IOR-ARC H.E. K V Bhagirath

Hon'ble Mr. Salman Khurshid, Minister of External Affairs, Government of India and Chair of Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation,

Hon'ble Mr. Richard Marles, Parliamentary Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Vice Chair

Hon'ble Ministers and Heads of Delegations

Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

It is indeed an immense honour for me to be present here this morning at this the 12th Meeting of the Council of Ministers and the second being hosted by the Chair. Let me, in the first instance, congratulate H.E. Mr Salman Khurshid, the new Union Minister of External Affairs of the Government of India for having assumed the responsibility of his calling. Your Excellency, it is more than a coincidence that has bestowed upon us the privilege of your Chairmanship of this conference.

The meeting of the Council of Ministers held in Bengaluru in November 2011, in which member states sought to re-invigorate the IOR-ARC, with a re-prioritized agenda, gave a focused direction towards formulation of a dynamic road map of cooperation, in consonance with the growing global emphasis on the unique geo-strategic primacy of the Indian Ocean rim. The realization that security and stability in this region were important factors for peace and prosperity, within and beyond this region, resulted in the new initiatives for IOR-ARC, in addition to critically important projects of cooperation in the prioritized sectors.

Hon'ble Ministers and Excellencies,

A year down that road, we now stand on the threshold of the IOR-ARC coming of age. Fifteen perhaps does not easily lend itself to a celebratory nomenclature, but it gives the opportunity for this distinguished gathering present here today, to set in motion a pragmatic and practical template for regional cooperation which addresses the existing challenges and harnesses the tremendous potential for partnership between states comprising this youthful Indian Ocean grouping.

These are difficult times when there is ferment in regions that have been our traditional economic partners. Pragmatism and innovation will be needed to adapt ourselves to the new realities in order to work towards realizing the "holistic vision of development" of the rim, envisaged a year ago.

It is, however, evident that the IOR-ARC is moving from strength-to-strength. Not only are countries within the rim seeking membership, but nations beyond it too desire partnership. As we grow in numbers, let us grasp the positives and simultaneously move forward and expand, in accordance with the charter of the organization. Let our legacy be the protection and development of our inheritance.

Hon'ble Ministers and Excellencies,

Let us remind ourselves that it was during the historic visit of Nelson Mandela, in January 1995 that the idea of institutionalizing regionalism in the Indian Ocean, with special focus on economic integration, was first enunciated. Let us pledge to redeem that simple vision that promises a future, free from want, for all the peoples of the Indian Ocean rim.

The IOR-ARC Secretariat, based in Mauritius, looks forward to working with the member states and dialogue partners to achieve that objective.

Thank you very much, Excellencies