

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,**  
**INDIA**  
**HIS EXCELLENCY MR. E. AHAMED**

**(5<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF IOR-ARC, COLOMBO,**  
**SRI LANKA)**

**AUGUST 26, 2004**

Mr. Chairman

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me, at the outset, convey my warm appreciation to the Government, and people of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka for the gracious hospitality extended to me and my delegation and for the excellent arrangements made for our meeting in Colombo.

2. This is the second consecutive year that Sri Lanka is hosting the Council of Ministers meeting, as a result of the last Council meeting's decision to have annual ministerial meetings. The purpose was to give impetus to our organisation's activities. Judging from the progress we have made since the last Council meeting, this appears to have infused some life into IOR-ARC. I wish to congratulate you, Mr Chairman, on your leadership and shouldering the onerous responsibility of taking our organisation on a rapid growth path.
3. In the letters you have addressed to us in recent weeks, we find a candid review and appreciation of the ground realities in the 7 years of IOR-ARC'S existence. It needs to be provided greater substance, only when we show real progress, would we be noticed and listened.
4. We can derive much satisfaction from the deliberations carried by our Senior Officials over the past two days. They have discussed the administrative and budgetary concerns. The recommendations they have made for our considerations are practical and reflective of the need of the hour. We need our Secretariat to be assured of all the logistical and budgetary support so that we can demand commensurate results from it. I wish to place on record my delegations high appreciation for the generous financial contribution Mauritius has made all three years in the running of the Coordinating Secretariats at Port Louis and the performance of the outgoing Director, Mr Dusoruth, in running the affairs of the Secretariats.
5. At this juncture, let me also express my good wishes to Ambassador I.Z.A Samsudeen, the incoming Executive Director of the Coordinating Secretariat, for a successful term. We hope that you will closely monitor the implementation of the many activities and projects proposed by the Academic Group, the Business Forum and the WGTI.

6. Mr. Chairman, I will be remiss if I fail to mention about the concerns you have expressed in your letter to us on the level of participation from member states and dialogue partners in our meetings. It is reflective of the interest our respective headquarters take in IOR-ARC affairs. I agree that unless there is a matching support from headquarters of every member state, the Coordinating Secretariat or the Working Group alone cannot made much headway. We must therefore, demonstrate the require political will to support the activities of our organisation. As you are aware Mr. Chairman, our parliament is currently in session but in difference to your sentiments, I chose to be present at this important meeting.
7. Friends, we need to develop projects or commission studies that provide tangible benefits to Member states and dialogue partners. Only then can we expect a matching level of interest from headquarters. The recommendation of the three working groups should have practical applications and facilitate conduct of trade, economic and other cooperation activities between us.
8. Foe example, we should organise workshops on issues having direct relevance to our trade and industry sectors or for our developmental activities or for the good of civil society. There are many areas where we can benefit by sharing each others development experiences, technologies, traditional knowledge or best practices. India would be happy to organise such mutually beneficial workshops and cover local costs. But unless there is commitment of participation from at least a simple majority of our membership, the enthusiasm gets diluted. This was our experience earlier this month when we hosted the 2-day IOR-ARC e-commerce Round Table in Delhi.
9. Yet another project of relevance to all Member States with high growth potential relates to the tourism sector. I am glad Mr. Chairman that you also hold similar views on this matter as was evident in our informal discussions last evening. Our country has vast potential in attracting tourism and rather than depending on tourists from developed world alone, we need to promote intra regional tourism. I am prepared to request the Ministry of Tourism of India to organise in India a workshop of travel trade and tourism industry representatives of the IOR-ARC Member States with back to back meeting of tourism ministers.
10. Mr. Chairman, in assessing the achievements of our organisation, we must also take into account the fact that we are a diverse group of countries coming from different geographical locations, different levels of economic, development and belonging to our respective regional grouping. But then we can have also the Indian Ocean that sustains the maritime lifeline of over 50% of world trade and binds us together. We should encourage the three working groups – the Academic Group, the Business Forum and the Working Group on Trade and Investment (WGTI) to come forward with such tangible proposals as would have relevance and interest for a majority of our membership.
11. I am glad that such an approach has been proposed by the WGTI with regard to the Preferential Trade Agreement. We should be happy to support all trade and investment promotion activities and facilitation measures.

12. Mr. Chairman, the private sector in India has made a significant progress in recent years. Our knowledge industries have created its own brand image. This is attracting major global corporations to invest and locate in India. At the same time, the Indian private sector is also looking for investment opportunities overseas. We have to be candid in admitting that the private sector corporations would invest in any legitimate business or economic activity in any location globally where they find commensurate returns on, and security of the investments. The Government of India is ready to facilitate private sector investments in IOR-ARC member states for mutual benefits.
13. Before I conclude, let me express Mr. Chairman, my delegations commitment for extending full support for carrying forward our young grouping on the path of rapid growth. I have no doubt that our deliberations under your mature leadership would help us arrive at concrete decisions in this regard. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.