

IOR-ARC Council of Ministers Colombo
26-27 AUGUST 2004
Speech delivered by Mr. Wilfred Bertile

**Mr Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As my delegation takes the floor for the first time in this ministerial council, let me first thank you warmly for the efficiency of the organisation provided since the beginning of the IOR-ARC meeting as well as the generous hospitality that Sri Lanka as a host country, has displayed.

The French Minister for foreign Affairs, Mr Barnier, ask me to tell you how greatly he appreciated the invitation extended to him to take part in this council of Ministers Meeting. He asked me to represent him on this occasion in my capacity as an elected official and the Vice President of the Regional Council of La Reunion island. Today, I am also speaking on behalf of the General Council of La Reunion, which is the second elected assembly of this island.

As you know, France is more than a Dialogue Partner. It is already a partner in cooperation with many countries in the Indian Ocean. France has also a historical presence in the South West Indian Ocean, in particular through La Reunion island whose population has constantly expressed his will to remain French, La Reunion island is therefore a fully fledged Department of France and as such, the only European Union territory in the Indian Ocean. The island has many assets, including modern and efficient infrastructures, a skilled labour force, universities and research facilities. With the help of its university, which has sent a representative to take part in the Academia's Group work, La Reunion intends to promote cooperation in the fields of education and research, mainly through student and teachers exchanges.

As my delegation has mentioned during the committee of Senior Officials, La Reunion island, which enjoys a large degree of competencies has the right to enter agreements with foreign partners. For instance, we have concluded agreements with various entities such as the Khazulu Natal Province in South Africa, the state of Karnataka in India, the Malagasy government in the field of education, the Province of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique and the Municipality of Tianjin in China.

Reunion's population has many origins, in Africa and Asia, as well as in Europe and France. Building on this strength, Reunion's priority is to expand its cooperation with Africa and Asia, from where a large part of its population comes from.

From La Reunion, which has the technical knowledge as well as the financial means. France would like to promote its cooperation in the Indian Ocean, as it has already done with its partners and neighbours on the Indian Ocean Commission (Comoros, Seychelles, Mauritius and Madagascar).

The IOR ARC provides an opportunity for implementing cooperation in many areas where France could contribute such as the environment and protection of endangered species and areas such as weather forecasting, tourism, fighting sea pollution, fisheries and the protection of fishing resources. We would also like to support more business-oriented projects aiming at developing trade and investment within the region. Building on its experiences with European construction, France could also help the IOR-ARC with the development of integration plans.

As you can see, France and in particular La Reunion island, is already involved in developing cooperation in our region.

We would like to play a more active role in the IOR ARC will enable us to develop all the existing potentialities. Therefore, we would like to be more systematically and more closely involved in preparing the projects of the organization. It would make it easier for us to provide a contribution to these projects if the relevant projects documents could be systematically sent to our Ambassador in Mauritius which we wish, subject to your agreement, to appoint as our special representative to IOR ARC Secretariat.

In conclusion Mr Chairman, let me express how convinced we are that IOR-ARC can benefits to its member countries and reaffirm how much France, through La Reunion island, is eager to develop, within this organisation, a mutually beneficial cooperation.

Thank You for your attention.