



**THE 20<sup>th</sup> INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS  
THE EMIRATES COMMUNIQUE  
17 DECEMBER 2020**

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegation of the Member States of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) - Commonwealth of Australia, People's Republic of Bangladesh, Union of Comoros, Republic of India, Republic of Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kenya, Republic of Madagascar, Malaysia, Republic of Maldives, Republic of Mauritius, Republic of Mozambique, Sultanate of Oman, Republic of Seychelles, Republic of Singapore, Republic of South Africa, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, United Republic of Tanzania, Kingdom of Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Republic of Yemen met on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2020 for the 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Council of Ministers (COM) which was convened virtually and hosted by the Chair, the United Arab Emirates.

We remain committed to strengthening solidarity, and enhancing multilateral cooperation to effectively respond to the challenges facing the Indian Ocean region.

We noted with deep concern the impact of COVID-19 and recognised the significant and negative impacts it has had on the region. We acknowledged the positive and supportive efforts undertaken by IORA Member States to overcome the multifaceted challenges brought about by the pandemic.

We therefore welcome the Statement on IORA Solidarity and Cooperation in response to COVID-19 issued by the United Arab Emirates, the IORA Chair, and the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO). We also commended the significant contributions made by IORA Member States and Dialogue Partners in providing medical aid and other support to bolster regional efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19.

We reiterated our strong condemnation of terrorism and extremism in all its forms and manifestations, and reaffirmed the solidarity of Member States' in combating terrorism.

We recognised the constructive discussions held during the 22<sup>nd</sup> Committee of Senior Officials and the outcomes of the workshop to review progress on the IORA Action Plan (2017-2021), as well as the preparation of a new IORA Action Plan (2022-2026) held on 20-21 October 2020. We called upon all Member States to intensify efforts to implement the remaining tasks of the Action Plan (2017-2021). We look forward to the development of the new Action Plan (2022-2026) to set a focused, achievable vision for IORA as a means to further deepen and broaden IORA integration through tangible policies and actions.

We welcomed Sri Lanka as the Vice-Chair of the Association for the period of 2021 to 2023 and took note of the interest announced by India to apply for the Vice-Chair position for the period of 2023-25.

We welcomed the French Republic as the 23rd member of the IORA. The French Republic has been admitted as a member of the IORA on account of Reunion only. We acknowledged the significant contributions France will make in further bolstering IORA's regional agenda, and look forward to working closely with France in developing constructive and positive outcomes for the Indian Ocean region.

We took note of the importance of establishing IORA Centre of Excellence for all priority and cross cutting areas in helping the progress of IORA. Therefore, we noted with appreciation the completion of Criteria of the Establishment of a Centre of Excellence for the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

We noted the progress made by the different Functional Bodies in advancing the actions in their respective work plans. In particular, the establishment of the new Working Group on Science, Technology and Innovation (WGSTI), and the Core Group on Fisheries Management (CGFM) will play pivotal roles in further implementing IORA's regional priorities.

We recognised the need for greater coordination and cooperation among search and rescue services and to build Search and Rescue (SAR) capacity and capability in the Indian Ocean region, whilst welcoming India as the 14th Signatory and Republic of Maldives as the 15th Signatory of the IORA MoU on Search and Rescue.

We recognize that SMEs are an emerging area of focus within IORA, which underlines the important role this economic sector has upon the facilitation of regional trade and investment. We welcomed the Republic of Maldives as the 13<sup>th</sup>, the United Arab Emirates as the 14th and Malaysia as the 15<sup>th</sup> Signatories of the IORA's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises.

We commended the establishment of "The IORA Nelson Mandela be the Legacy Internship Programme", which will commence in July 2021.

We noted the proposal for a White Paper on IORA's approach to Blue Carbon finance, which will improve financial literacy on blue carbon issues among stakeholders.

We welcomed IORA's ongoing partnership with UN Women, including the launch by Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women, the Hon. Marise Payne, of a research report into women's economic participation in the Indian Ocean region entitled "*Women's Economic Empowerment in Fisheries in the Blue Economy of the Indian Ocean*".

We appreciated the training programs conducted in the field of Sea Level Analysis, Fishery Oceanography and Film making as part of capacity building initiatives in the Indian Ocean Region.

We recognised the importance of streamlining decision-making processes through necessary administrative sub-structures, which will deliver further administrative efficiencies and improvements in IORA's ongoing operations. We noted that a task force/ Working Group will be established to progress the range of institutional and management issues under South Africa's coordination. We also welcomed the Indian Ocean Champion Concept which would strengthen the visibility and awareness of IORA, as well as its prominence in the Indian Ocean region.

We noted with satisfaction a number of encouraging developments in respect to IORA Member State-Dialogue Partner cooperation. These include announcement of an additional EUR 1.2 million by Germany to more than double the funding dedicated to cooperation in maritime safety and security, disaster risk management, the blue economy and strengthening the Secretariat; the Secretary-General's signing of a

Memorandum of Understanding with France to govern a EUR 1 million partnership on fisheries management and strengthening the Secretariat; virtual conferences hosted by Italy and the Republic of Korea; and ongoing discussions with the USA on cooperation on women's economic empowerment. We welcomed discussions on further strengthening IORA's Engagement with Dialogue Partners. We implored all Member States and Dialogue Partners to continue to leverage existing frameworks to bolster cooperation to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

We welcomed the interest from regional organisations, most notably, the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) in developing stronger collaboration and cooperation with IORA based on shared interests, constructive engagement, and mutual benefit. We applauded the re-establishment of cooperation between IORA and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and look forward to establishing a viable and lasting partnership on renewable energy with this critical international organisation.

We noted the progress made in the process of amendment of the Administrative Arrangements of the IORA Special Fund. We encouraged all Member States to contribute to and make use of the Special Fund of IORA for effective implementation of programmes in priority and cross-cutting areas of the Association.

We further noted the proposal of establishing the IORA Human Development Fund, aimed towards closing the region's human developmental gaps.

We took note that the term of the incumbent Secretary General, Ambassador Dr. Nomvuyo N. Nokwe, will come to an end on 31 January 2021, and took the opportunity to thank and congratulate Ambassador Dr. Nokwe for her hard work and commitment towards furthering the activities of the Association. We also recognized the end of term of Prof. V.N Attri, the Chair in Indian Ocean Studies and recognised his valuable work in the capacity as Chair in Indian Ocean Studies over the last six years.

We extended our appreciation to the Government of the United Arab Emirates for hosting the meeting and we praised the work of the Secretariat in preparation of the documents for the 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Council of Ministers and related meetings.

**Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates  
17 December 2020**

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