

**Excellency Mr. Jean Paul Adam, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Seychelles, Co-Chair**

**Excellencies, Honourable Ministers**

**Distinguished guests**

Let me welcome you all to this panel discussion on the theme of “Harnessing the potential of the ocean economy”.

Allow me at the outset to draw attention to one basic fact. The very reason for the establishment of the IOR-ARC in 1995 was to regroup States which have a common affiliation to the Indian Ocean. Collectively we control an ocean space which is now the centre of global strategy whether in terms of maritime trade, oceanic research and exploitation or defence. However we are yet to achieve tangible cooperation on ocean matters.

This panel discussion is therefore an opportunity to deliberate on how, we can pool our efforts to realize and sustainably reap the economic potential of our ocean for the benefit of our population.

Like many IOR-ARC member States, the Government of Mauritius also has a vision to centre its future economic development around an Ocean-based economy to eventually transform the country into an Ocean State. This is a challenge, albeit an exciting one. It will require manifold changes both within the country as well as at the regional and international levels.

For the sake of our current discussion, I will dwell primarily on three factors that to me, are crucial to enable us, irrespective of our size or economic might, to ultimately benefit from the potential of the ocean economy.

These are

- (i) The international legal architecture that oversees ocean governance;
- (ii) Capacity, expertise and technology;

### (iii) Funding

On the issue of the legal architecture, it is clear that there is an emerging link between the environment, development, and the peaceful uses of the sea in the global arena which can be the basis of the ocean strategy of the IOR-ARC.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and subsequent developments like Agenda 21, the Convention on Biological Diversity and other international conventions and instruments, provide the internationally acceptable policy frameworks for the management and use of the oceans by States.

However by themselves, those policy frameworks do not meet all the needs of regional parties. Many of their provisions leave details to be resolved through diplomatic efforts as new issues arise. In fact issues such as fish-stock exploitation and seabed genetic resources beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, remain potential sources of conflict.

ICT connectivity, sovereignty disputes and intellectual property rights are also issues that have been the subject of contentions.

The development of ICT connectivity which invariably passes through the laying of undersea cables continues to be the subject of disputes in spite of the requirement that such activities not be impeded by the coastal states.

Sovereignty disputes in the delimitation of maritime boundaries act as an obstacle in the effective development of the ocean potential. For example as was clearly voiced by the Solemn Declaration of the African Union on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in May 2013, the decolonization process of Mauritius is still incomplete.

45 years of independence Mauritius is still unable to exercise sovereignty over its full territory. The unlawful occupation of the Chagos Archipelago is well known to many of you. Our inability to exercise our sovereign rights deprives Mauritius of an extended EEZ and continental shelf zone, that would have benefitted the prosperity of my people.

Harnessing the potential of the ocean also impinges on the issue of Intellectual Property Rights. The legitimacy of asserting IPR over what constitute patentable scientific data and information resulting from ocean exploration expeditions is not contested. However the obligation to disclose information related to the patent filed, is often limited, since much of that information tends to be treated as confidential. Additionally, inconsistencies between UNCLOS and the international patent system, especially with the WTO TRIPS Agreement as well as lack of standardized terminology are issues that the international community needs to settle rapidly.

Let me therefore make an appeal to the IOR-ARC to create a coherent diplomatic agenda around a common position on how to frame an ocean governance structure that would benefit us all. This will help us to develop a long term proactive stance instead of merely responding to incidents and crises when they occur.

The second point that I want to make is that, harnessing the economic potential of the Ocean will remain a vain project unless States have the required capacity, expertise and technology to transform the opportunities into profitable ventures. This shortcoming can be addressed by the setting up of

- (i) an IOR-ARC Ocean Science, Technology and Innovation Chapter, and**
- (ii) an Ocean Economy Observatory**

Let me explain my proposals.

Although collectively we control a large part of the Indian Ocean, few of our Member States have the technical capability to monitor activities, implement laws and regulations and more importantly enforce those laws in our territorial waters.

While it is true that international organizations such as the International Maritime Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the UN Environment Program and the Commission on Sustainable Development among others are playing a sterling role in helping States manage the ocean and its resources, it is time for us to accrue intra-IOR-ARC cooperation by developing partnerships to enhance our technical capacity and enforcement assistance.

Building on the success of the IOR Academic Group, I strongly believe that consideration should be given to the creation of an **IOR-ARC Ocean Science, Technology and Innovation Chapter** to chart a roadmap of Research and Development that will provide a basis for strong partnerships.

Partnerships and synergies among institutions, such as Universities, Research institutes, Big Industries and Small and Medium Enterprises, could also bring together a broad range of expertise.

The outcome of such partnerships could be monitored by an **Ocean Economy Observatory** that will keep us abreast of all developments in the sector and guide our national development plans.

My third point is that the sustainable exploitation of the potential of the ocean necessitates the mobilization of financial resources. The Rio+20 Outcome document indeed recognized the need for significant mobilization of resources from a variety of

sources and the effective use of financing, in order to give strong support to developing countries in their efforts to promote their sustainable development.

We are glad to note that the Intergovernmental Committee mandated by the Rio+20 Outcome document has been set up and will commence work shortly. We believe that we should seize the opportunity of that intergovernmental process to propose concrete ideas including innovative sources of funding so that adequate resources are mobilized to help us successfully implement a sustainable ocean development strategy.

To conclude let us remind ourselves that we share an ocean that sustains such a diversified range of activities essential for our socio-economic welfare: industry, energy, transport, water and food, tourism, defense, security, health, extraction of minerals, oil and gas, leisure and recreation, and others.

Aware of this enormous potential, but knowing the great dispersion of talents and skills in the region, various initiatives need to be taken to encourage the creation of suitable tools for coordination between Governments and citizens. Sustainability of the Ocean Economy will depend a lot on ownership of projects.

It is therefore urgent that a real inter-IOR-ARC cooperation be spearheaded to align our efforts to tackle the challenges posed in the development of the ocean economy. I would welcome your comments on the proposal I have made.

Thank You