

## **Opening remarks - IORA Council of Ministers' Meeting**

### **Julie Bishop MP**

**Perth, 9 October 2014**

I am honoured to welcome you back to my home town of Perth, Australia's Indian Ocean Rim capital, for the 14<sup>th</sup> Council of Ministers' Meeting.

In the year since we last met I have sought to visit a number of IORA countries in order to better understand the different perspectives that our region has to offer. So far I have visited about half of our number so by 2015 I'm sure I will have visited the other half.

It is quickly apparent to those who have travelled across the region that the Indian Ocean Rim is marked by great diversity in cultures, climates and people – socially, economically, politically. Yet we all share a bond with the ocean on which we depend for security, sustenance and growth.

We have invested time and effort in continuing to build IORA as the premier organisation of the region and I believe we have achieved a good deal. Our international profile is growing with renewed interest across the region in joining IORA with the Maldives, Myanmar and Somalia all working towards membership.

We have continued to seek closer links with prominent regional and global organisations including the United Nations, the African Ocean and the Indian Ocean Commission. We have given our least developed and developing members better access to IORA's special fund to encourage broader based participation across the region.

We have carved out a greater role for dialogue partners in IORA in recognition of the important role they play in our region's future prosperity. And I warmly welcome the representatives of our dialogue partner countries, particularly those who have travelled from their capitals. I believe the United States once more wins the prize for having travelled the most distance, thank you Ambassador Shannon.

Last year in Perth IORA made a landmark decision to establish women's empowerment as a cross-cutting issue across IORA's six priority areas. In 2014 we have seen progress on this goal. Australia and India convened IORA's inaugural economic empowerment events in Kuala Lumpur, where Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls Natasha Stott-Despoja chaired the event, and, in Hyderabad, taking the first steps on the IORA path to unlocking the economic potential of women across the Indian Ocean.

IORA members have embraced a range of new initiatives across IORA's six priority areas including in aquaculture, renewable energy, customs and trade facilitation, ocean science and maritime security. We

have sought to increase the opportunities for regional businesses to connect including through the IORA Business Week events held in parallel to IORA's official meetings. The connection between our respective chambers of commerce has great potential to develop into a vibrant network.

Today we will turn our attention to the coming year and build on the positive momentum generated in recent times. For the first time we will have the opportunity through this Council of Ministers' Meeting to hear from senior business representatives from India, Indonesia and Australia on the benefits of greater connectivity in the Indian Ocean region.

We will seek to agree on a set of core principles for driving sustainable economic growth in our region, our economic diplomacy declaration should be demonstration of our collective will to ensure the region is prosperous and strong.

We will look to build on the strength and solidarity shown in the face of the tragic events surrounding Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 by committing to work even more closely to protect those that traverse the Indian Ocean through a Memorandum of Understanding on search and rescue cooperation.

The inaugural Indian Ocean Dialogue, hosted by India, was a highlight of the IORA calendar. We should continue the dialogue and through it create a space for creative discussion on pressing issues of the region. Inspired by India's example, Australia proposes to host the second Indian Ocean Dialogue in 2015 to discuss overarching strategic issues concerning our region and we will work closely with other member states to ensure its success. IORA is the only Ministerial-level forum that spans the Indian Ocean and is uniquely positioned to shape our neighbourhood in a way that forges closer ties and delivers greater peace and prosperity to the Indian Ocean region.

As Australia enters its final year as chair I urge delegates to maintain the strong momentum generated over recent years. We must continue to revitalise IORA giving a stronger international voice to issues which are important to the Indian Ocean region and we must deliver initiatives that will be a real benefit to our diverse membership.

I was pleased to be able to visit the IORA Secretariat in Port Louis, Mauritius last month and I thank Ambassador Bhagirath and his team at the Secretariat for their dedicated work in taking forward IORA's agenda and in preparing for this meeting.

I now invite the Secretary-General to make his opening remarks.