

**Speech by Hon. Marie Joseph Noël-Etienne Ghislain Sinatambou,
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade,
Republic of Mauritius
at the Opening Ceremony of
First IORA Ministerial Ocean/Blue Economy Conference,
Le Meridien Hotel, Mauritius,
3 September 2015 at 10.45 hours**

**Honourable Steven Ciobo, current Chair of IORA
Honourable Ministers
Ambassador V. Bhagirath, Secretary General of the IORA
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished IORA Dialogue Partners
Senior Officials
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It gives me immense pleasure to extend to you all a very cordial welcome to Mauritius on the occasion of the First IORA Ocean/Blue Economy Conference.

I would like to thank the Right Honourable Prime Minister for having accepted to grace the opening ceremony of the First IORA Ocean/Blue Economy Conference, and to deliver the keynote address. This bears testimony to the high importance that Mauritius attaches to this landmark event. I also wish to express a special word of welcome to Honourable Steven Ciobo from Australia, the current chair of the IORA.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to IORA Member States and to the IORA Secretariat for their contribution and collaboration towards the organisation of this Conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Mauritius is indeed honoured to host this First Conference. The Conference is about ocean/blue economy, portraying the huge watery/maritime domain that our IORA region is blessed with. It is about the Indian Ocean and its potential: "The Indian Ocean" as Robert Kaplan has aptly said in his book "Monsoon" "will be the true nexus of world power in the coming years". We need to recognize the importance of seas along which 90% of the global trade and two-thirds of petroleum supplies travel. The Ocean has also immense resources which can be harnessed.

This Conference, therefore, emerges not simply as a festival of ideas but is a telling barometer of the mood of all the IORA countries willing to forge ahead in ocean development. This sense of expectation and wanting to deliver quickly is very visible in policy discussions, especially in Mauritius, where we have a clear vision of not only we want to achieve but also how to achieve. There are manifold challenges, quite tall in order, but with the spirit of co-operation and the feeling of all countries being on roll, we can make it. One major expected outcome from the Conference is a Road Map that can make the Ocean Economy work. Other follow-up conferences are envisaged, as I am told that ocean development will occupy a prominent place on the IORA agenda for the next decade.

The development of an oceanic industry to assist Member States to build resilience against exogenous shocks was first raised at the first IORA Economic and Business Conference (EBC I) which was co-hosted by Mauritius and India and was held in Mauritius on 4-5 July 2013. During the same conference, Mauritius had chaired a session on "Harnessing the potential of the Ocean Economy".

In view of its growing global importance, the previous Ministerial Retreat which was organized during the 14th IORA Council of Ministers Meeting held in Perth, Australia, in October 2014 pushed the matter further.

Currently, there is also a flurry of other activities in the area of ocean development at the level of the IORA, namely the laudable Sri Lankan Centre of Excellence (CoE) on Ocean Studies and Environment and the upcoming second Indian Ocean Dialogue to be hosted by Australia on 6-7 September 2015.

We, therefore, see this first Conference on Ocean/Blue Economy as an offshoot of the first IORA Economic and Business Conference and also as a means to streamline discussions held on the subject in different IORA fora.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The ocean and its resources are increasingly seen as a promising economic sector, in addressing the multiple challenges the planet will face in the decades to come such as food security, job creation and energy. Laying the foundations of an ocean economy is an exceptional pursuit for the expansion of our spatial boundaries, the development of scientific knowledge and business opportunities. The remarkable potential in the ocean economy will undoubtedly lead to the creation of high productivity jobs and improving the living standard of our people.

In our efforts to develop the ocean economy, we must stand guided by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which remains the main regulatory framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. UNCLOS is also of strategic importance as the basis for national, regional and global action and cooperation in the marine sector. Under UNCLOS, every coastal nation has jurisdiction over its EEZ extending from its territorial baselines and over which it has exclusive rights with regards to environment protection, fish stocks, and exploration of its living and non-living resources.

Member States of IORA have a huge maritime zone to manage which holds a massive potential for development that can change significantly the shape of their economies. It is therefore crucial that IORA embarks on appropriate programmes to assist the Member States to develop their ocean economy within the framework of UNCLOS and respective national as well as regional governance regimes.

In addition to UNCLOS and its two implementing agreements, a number of international instruments at the global and regional levels are relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction- These include the regulations adopted by the International Seabed Authority (ISA), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), instruments adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); measures adopted in the context of the International Maritime Organization; measures considered in the context of the World Trade Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization. I therefore strongly believe that a coordinated action by the IORA Member States will be in the interest of all in dealing with the ocean-related economic issues and challenges as well as to benefit from the various international and regional ocean related instruments.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As you are all aware, one of the main outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference was the agreement by member States to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will build upon the Millennium Development Goals and converge with the post 2015 development agenda. The SDGs will take on board the unfinished goals set under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The ocean and the seas have not been forgotten in the post-2015 development agenda. It is laudable that Member States have agreed to integrate ocean issues into a SDG framework as a dedicated stand-alone goal (Goal 14-Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development).

The inclusion of a stand-alone goal for the conservation and preservation of the oceans will present opportunities as well as challenges for Mauritius as this will allow us to exploit ocean resources in a sustainable manner for economic diversification, job creation and wealth generation.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Multilateral trade negotiations and agreements have increasingly been playing a role in the regulation of goods and services that affect and concern oceans and marine resources. WTO SIDS are actively participating in the Doha Round negotiations through several groupings – including the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP), least developed countries (LDC) and small, vulnerable economies (SVEs) – with a view to advancing their trade and development interests and ensuring a balance between environmental sustainability and economic growth.

Trade in marine sectors can be boosted by introducing sound regulatory and institutional frameworks to develop ancillary services needed to undertake these activities, including financial, insurance, communications, testing and certification and research and development (R&D) activities.

IORA members need to build up on the commonality of having their shores touching the same ocean and try to develop a thriving maritime sector in the region. Ports have always been at the forefront of maritime economic organization and have helped transform underdeveloped regions into important trade centres which, in turn, have created jobs. Similarly, IORA members need to tap the opportunity for the region to become a marine industrial centre for shipbuilding and repairs. This will subsequently entail enhanced businesses, movement of skilled and semi-skilled workers and eventually increase trade in the region.

Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) like Mauritius, by their natural characteristics, depend heavily on the fisheries sector. The Indian Ocean states share substantial interests in the management and conservation of the region's rich fish resources. The impacts of overfishing and climate change have accelerated the reduction of major fish stocks in the region. At the level of the WTO, Mauritius advocates the fact that small countries that depend heavily on the fisheries sector should be excluded from implementing strict disciplines on fisheries subsidies to allow them to support their fisheries industry. I would like to urge IORA countries that are also WTO members to re-assert their interests in WTO discussions on fisheries subsidies to be able to better react to any potential breakthrough in negotiations.

Ladies and Gentlemen

IORA Member States have a collective vision for an equitable development of the Ocean/Blue Economy as an important pillar for sustainable growth.

We have in our region countries which already have advanced know-how in specific sectors of the ocean economy. The commitment of more advanced members of the IORA to develop the ocean/blue economy sector and to assist other members to pursue their quest in exploring this sector and in making it an income generating industry is desirable. The IORA can also explore the possibility of facilitating and coordinating a sharing of experiences among the members of the Association.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Sustained regional co-operation efforts in ocean development can, in the long run, transform the IORA region into a model for inclusive and sustainable development. I would like to encourage both the public and private sector representatives present today to work towards achieving this long term vision.

I am confident that this Conference will come up with concrete and practical recommendations for the advancement of ocean development in IORA Member States.

With these concluding words, I wish you all success in your deliberations.

I thank you for your attention.