

**THE 15<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE IORA COUNCIL OF MINISTERS (COMM)  
PADANG, INDONESIA  
23 OCTOBER 2015**

**STATEMENT BY  
Ambassador Zainal Abidin Bakar  
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***“Strengthening Maritime Cooperation in a Peaceful and Stable  
Indian Ocean”***

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**Her Excellency Retno Marsudi,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia**

**His Excellency Ambassador K.V. Baghirath,  
Secretary General of IORA**

**Honourable Ministers**

**Distinguished Delegates**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

At the outset, I would like to join other delegations, in expressing our gratitude to you, Excellency, and the Indonesian Government for the warm reception and hospitality extended to the Malaysian delegation. I also wish to commend the excellent arrangements made by the Indonesian Government in hosting the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the IORA Council of Ministers.

2. I would also like to congratulate Indonesia for assuming the Chair of IORA for the term 2015-2017. Our appreciation goes to the Government of Australia, for its commendable leadership of IORA over the last two years.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,**

3. The Indian Ocean is considered to be the third largest body of water in the world. This estimation leads to the understanding that the Indian Ocean space encompasses some 20 percent of the world’s water surface. The Indian Ocean is an integral component in the Southern Sea Route, connecting strategic sea lanes like the Straits of Malacca in the east, with the Suez Canal in the west. Clearly, the Indian Ocean is a major sea route for world commerce, linking East Asia, South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa, with Europe and the Americas. Thus, the importance of the Indian Ocean for global trade and economic development warrants that constant due attention should be given to contemporary geo-strategic and geo-economic matters. And in the context of ensuring sustainability of resources of the sea, it is important to highlight that the Indian Ocean is also faced with problems of unregulated and over exploitation of fishery resources, as well as growing threats of biodiversity degradation and environmental pollution.

4. Therefore, the current theme of “Strengthening Maritime Cooperation in a Peaceful and Stable Indian Ocean”, as proposed by Indonesia, is indeed significant and timely, given the current challenges facing the Indian Ocean Rim countries.

5. Against this background, Malaysia believes that IORA should focus on tangible areas of cooperation that could provide an avenue for each Member State to move forward in enhancing our regional cooperation, solidifying our ties, and strengthening our regional identity, for the benefits of our people.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,**

6. Given the Indian Ocean's rich resources and economic potential, the region is also exposed to certain security challenges. Maritime crime such as piracy and armed robbery at sea, is a problem that still persists in certain water areas in the Indian Ocean region. This issue poses a threat to the safety of seafarers, international trade and regional stability. According to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) piracy report, a total of 42 incidents of piracy and armed robbery have occurred in the Indian Ocean water areas in 2014, as compared to only 30 incidents in 2013. To this extent, economic activities along this vital sea route would be hampered. One way to overcome problems and challenges from such incidents would be for IORA Member States to collaborate and streamline expertise on maritime security cooperation.

7. In the realm of economy, Malaysia views that there are enormous economic prospect within the Indian Ocean region that remains untapped. As such, the deepening of regional economic integration may help in exploiting IORA's trade and investment potential that will mutually benefit IORA Member States. Malaysia alone has experienced a growing partnership with the IORA countries over the last 15 years. The total trade for 2014 recorded an increase of 40 percent to over USD143 billion compared to 2013. Malaysia has also established economic pacts with several IORA countries through a range of bilateral and regional mechanisms. Similarly, IORA Member States should further enhance their intra-trade cooperation in our fast growing region. In this regard, Malaysia supports the initiative to convene the Second Economic and Business Conference from 11 to 13 April 2016, to be hosted by the UAE in Dubai.

8. The IORA should also leverage on its vast cultural diversity through an expanded cooperation in the tourism sector. As of 2014, Malaysia alone received 19.9 million tourist arrivals from IORA Member States. This amounted to an increase of 50.6 percent to the previous year. Indeed, the sector has generated a huge economic benefit for Malaysia. Therefore, Malaysia welcomes the recommendations to organize more tourism and travel fairs that were made during the Second Meeting of Experts on Tourism in Durban, South Africa on 9 May 2015. We are also of the view that this sector should be explored further, particularly in connecting unique tourism destinations among the Member States. Invariably, it would also strengthen people-to-people links under the IORA framework.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,**

9. IORA is a well-placed pan-regional forum for economic cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. We should draw on our strengths and potentials. With our commitments and collective efforts, Malaysia believes that IORA can be transformed into an effective regional institution for mutual benefit. In concluding, I would like to reaffirm Malaysia's commitment towards fulfilling the purpose and objectives of IORA.

Thank you.