

COM Remarks by Ambassador K.V.Bhagirath
Secretary General IORA
23 October 2015

Hon Retno Marsudi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, and Chair of IORA,

Hon. Nomaindiya Mfeketo, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa, and Vice-Chair of IORA,

Hon. Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, and Past Chair of IORA,

Honourable Ministers and Head of Delegations of Member States and Dialogue Partners of IORA,

Distinguished Delegates and Participants,

I congratulate Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi for assuming the Chair of Indian Ocean Rim Association and thank the Government of Indonesia for its exceptional hospitality and excellent arrangements for the 15th IORA Council of Ministers Meeting in this Indian Ocean city of Padang.

I also congratulate Hon.Nomaindiya Mfeketo as the new Vice-Chair, and look forward to South Africa playing an active role in that capacity, in concert with the Chair.

I would like to place on record our profound appreciation to Foreign Minister Julie Bishop for her charismatic leadership and vision during the past two years as Chair. It has been a privilege and a challenge to work with you Hon Minister since Australia took over as Chair in 2013 and we hope that IORA will continue to engage your attention.

I also welcome the Federal Republic of Germany as the 7th Dialogue Partner and look forward to working with them in areas of interest to IORA Member States.

The past three days have seen detailed discussions by academics, the business community and senior officials from Member States and Dialogue Partners on important and critical issues, thus setting the stage for the agenda of this Council of Ministers Meeting.

Indonesia is assuming the Chair at a crucial juncture as the Association moves towards the completion of its second decade. I am confident that the focus of Indonesia on the priority sectors of IORA and its new initiatives are indicative of Indonesia's firm commitment to expanding and deepening regional partnerships. The new path breaking ideas of the Chair have enormous significance for the future course of IORA.

Excellencies,

I would like to highlight certain important issues that merit the attention of the Ministers and Heads of delegations. The Chair has introduced an important initiative- the IORA Concord- and this COM is to decide on the Establishment of an Adhoc Committee for formulating the document. A timeline that aims to finalise the text of the Concord for the 2016 COM, which is a few months before the 20th anniversary of IORA in March 2017, when the Concord is proposed to be signed during the IORA Summit is in the agenda today for your consideration.

It is hard work ahead if we are to develop the IORA Concord as document that is not only a statement of intent, but also a pragmatic and practical instrument for forging regional synergies that promote peace and prosperity in the region.

The second issue which I would like to bring to the notice of the COM is that the IORA today has four ministerial levels of engagement- Trade, Tourism, Renewable Energy and the Blue Economy. The last-mentioned sector encompasses the several economic and infrastructural ministries, including Fisheries, Shipping, Ports, Minerals and Biotechnology etc.

It would have been ideal if Member States could create a convergence mechanism that harnesses the common elements from these multiple streams from which economic benefits can flow to Member States.

I might mention here that the Phakisa initiative of South Africa, a ministerial convergence mechanism is both functional and effective, even though challenging.

The only IORA event I would like to single out is the forthcoming Ministerial Economic and Business Conference- EBC 2, to be hosted by the United Arab Emirates in April 2016.

The focus is proposed to be on Small and Medium Enterprises and New Technologies sectors. The advice the Secretariat has received from some Member States is that a single sector focus event is considered more attractive for businesses, entrepreneurs and investors. Taking this into consideration, the Secretariat proposes to formulate a draft format and program for EBC-2, that will be circulated to Member States and Dialogue Partners for consideration, after consultations with the host Member State. I am happy to inform you that Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi has expressed interest in participating in EBC- 2.

EBC- 2 will also include a full session of Women CEO's, in keeping with IORA's commitment to women's empowerment.

I believe that IORA can look to the future with considerable optimism. The leadership of the Chair is vital for generating the earnestness of other Member States. The Vice Chair too can be an effective collaborator, and together the Chair and Vice Chair can form a joint 4 year partnership agenda that could well be a game changer for IORA.

I once again congratulate the Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi for assuming the Chair. I take this opportunity to convey to Indonesia the full commitment of the Secretariat to strengthen the regional agenda of IORA.

Excellencies, I thank you for your attention.