

Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC)

Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC), a regional cooperation initiative of the Indian Ocean Rim countries, was established in Mauritius in March 1997 with the aim of promoting economic and technical cooperation, including expansion of trade and investment. The IORARC Secretariat is located at Port Louis, Mauritius.

India is one of the founder members of IORARC. The Indian Ocean Rim, a heterogeneous area with a wide diversity of languages, culture and religions, is linked to India's destiny by name. The countries are diverse in size, areas and economic strength. Many of the IOR countries are becoming globally competitive and are developing new capacities which can be jointly harnessed through regional cooperation efforts. It has abundant human resources and technological capabilities.

The IORARC was formally launched at the first Ministerial Meeting in Mauritius on 6-7 March 1997. Presently it has 20 members – Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Malaysia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, UAE and Yemen. There are six Dialogue Partners namely China, Egypt, France, Japan, UK and USA. There are two Observers also namely, Indian Ocean Research Group (IORG) and Indian Ocean Tourism Organisation (IOTO), Oman.

The Charter of IORARC was adopted by 14 member countries in March 1997. It was revised in 2010. The Council of Ministers, on voluntary offer by Member States, elects a Chair of the Association for a period of two years. The incoming Chair serves as the Vice-Chair of IORARC during the full term of office of the incumbent Chair. The role of the Chair is to arrange, coordinate, host and

to preside the meetings of the Council of Ministers (COM), Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) as well as any other meetings as mandated by the Council.

The apex body of the IORARC is the Council of Ministers (COM) at the level of Foreign Ministers. The meeting of the COM is preceded by the meetings of Indian Ocean Rim Academic Group (IORAG), Indian Ocean Rim Business Forum (IORBF), Working Group on Trade and Investment (WGTI), and CSO. Twelve (12) COM meetings have been held so far, last one in Gurgaon, India in November 2012.

Besides the functioning Regional Center for Science and Transfer of Technology (RCSTT) for IORARC in Tehran, IORARC has various projects under implementation such as Fisheries Support Unit (FSU) and Maritime Transport Council (MTC) for IORARC in Oman. As a financial mechanism for supporting and complementing the funding of Projects and Programmes adopted by the Association, IORARC has a Special Fund. India was the first country to announce an initial contribution of US\$ 50,000 to the Special Fund which has been followed by several Member-States. India further contributed US\$ 1 million to the Special Fund as announced during the 11th COM in Bengaluru on 15 November 2011.

The 11th meeting of COM was held in Bengaluru on 15 November 2011 where India assumed the Chair of IORARC and Australia assumed the Vice-Chair. India worked with other members to build consensus on themes of contemporary relevance to all members, for IORARC to focus on in the coming years. Six priority areas were identified to take forward the cooperation under IORARC: *(i) Maritime Safety and Security; (ii) Trade and Investment Facilitation; (iii) Fisheries Management; (iv) Disaster Risk Reduction; (v) Academic and S&T Cooperation; and (vi) Tourism Promotion and Cultural Exchanges.*

The 12th meeting of COM was held in Gurgaon on 2 November 2012. At

the end of the meeting the Gurgaon Communiqué that captures the deliberations in the Council on the theme “IORARC at 15 – The Next Decade” was issued. The 12th COM confirmed the offer by Indonesia to take up the position of Vice-Chair, which would arise at the next meeting of the COM, when Australia would be elevated to the position of Chair of the Association.

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