

International Women's Day
Women in Democracy

Speech of Mrs Fatoumia Aboudlkarim Bazi, Chargée de mission
Indian Ocean Commission, Ebène, 8 March 2013

Her Excellency Dr Nokwe, High Commissioner of the Republic of South Africa,

Mrs Asha Kannan, Ag UN Resident Coordinator

Mr/ Mrs the representative of the Ministry of gender equality

Mrs Vimi Appadoo, President of l'Association mauricienne des femmes chefs d'entreprise,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a real pleasure to welcome you in the offices of the Indian Ocean Commission to celebrate the international women's day.

This initiative comes from the High Commissioner of the Republic of South Africa to whom we extend our heartiest gratitude.

We are gathered this evening to discuss about a broad but fundamental topic: Women in democracy.

It is a theme that the IOC has since 2007 been tackling, through its focused actions which have brought about concrete results.

And this is only the beginning! The commitment of the IOC on the themes linked to gender will be renewed and consolidated. But before I embark on this, allow me to present our organisation to you.

Founded in 1982, the Indian Ocean Commission is an intergovernmental organization of regional cooperation that groups five member states [Comoros, France/Reunion, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles], thus constituting of four ACP countries and, for the French side, an outermost region of Europe.

The IOC is the only African regional organization which comprises exclusively of islands. The IOC has proven itself over the years as a natural platform to defend the specific interests of its island states which have in common isolation, sensitive environments, exposure to natural disasters, and a high dependence on marine and coastal resources.

The IOC's mission is to strengthen the ties of friendship and solidarity between peoples, and to contribute to the sustainable development of its member States. The missions of the IOC have gradually evolved to meet new challenges (food, climate,

energy, environment ..), and to cope with issues related to globalization and regional integration. To achieve this, the IOC articulates its mission around four strategic priorities:

- Political and diplomatic cooperation;
- Economic and trade cooperation;
- Regional sustainable Development; and
- The strengthening of the regional cultural identity.

The gender issue, to which the IOC attaches great importance, is vast and it regroups the overall four strategic priorities.

Indeed, the IOC has adopted a holistic approach by validating, a regional strategy on gender at the 25th Council of Ministers meeting in 2009.

The regional strategy on gender focuses on four areas:

- Fight against gender based violence;
- Improving women's participation in decision-making process and in politics;
- Strengthening the economic weight of women through the promotion of female entrepreneurship; and
- Empowering the role of women in sustainable development policies and particularly in food security.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The IOC is fully committed to the realisation of the 3rd objective of the millennium development goal for the

development devoted to gender. Our objectives are realistic and some have already been attained.

Our actions are fruitful as they involve our financial and technical partners, the EU, UNFPA, UNDP, UN WOMEN, African Development Bank, and l'Agence française de développement.

Our actions are especially fruitful because the women for whom we work are always involved in those actions.

Since the setting up for the regional strategy for Gender, the IOC has realised the following:

1. In March 2011, we launched the regional platform of Women in Politics. That was only a first step which we need to consolidate or even review for a wider involvement of the African region.

And here I would like to mention, that in line with the topic that regroups us this evening, women in democracy, the example of one of the IOC members, the Seychelles. A study carried out by the Royal Commonwealth Society in 54 countries, members of the commonwealth, ranks Seychelles at the 4th position as a country where it feels good to be born a girl.

This is an example for the whole world and for the other country members of IOC, where still much effort is required for gender parity.

2. In July 2011, a regional platform for the fight against gender based violence was launched. This event coincided with the launching of the campaign of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to end gender based violence “Tous unis pour mettre fin à la violence à l’égard des femmes”.

We are organising a regional meeting and awareness training for journalists on gender-based violence in Madagascar.

3. In May 2012 in South Korea, the IOC has signed a partnership agreement with the global network of women entrepreneurs (EMF) to boost its regional network of women entrepreneurs « Entreprendre au féminin océan indien ». Moreover, the IOC organised a regional forum “Premier forum des femmes entrepreneurs de l’océan Indien” in Madagascar in October 2012. In the context of this meeting, an Agreement has been signed with the Network of Women Entrepreneurs of Central Africa with the objective of sharing best practice and the promotion of women entrepreneurship in the African region.

As you can see, the IOC has created and mobilize networks for the benefit of women. We rejoice also that our actions have led to the emergence of female leadership.

Mrs Sylvia Pagès, the President of the IOC Regional platform of Women Entrepreneurship and the regional platform of Madagascar, is becoming a key figure of women's empowerment in the region.

Mrs. Silly Echad Assad, President of the Comorian national platform of Women in politics is the mayor of Mutsamoudou.

Here's proof that the economic and social empowerment opens the doors of decision-making spheres.

That said, efforts are needed in the pursuit of our mandate that binds women and sustainable development. This is what we do. I have the pleasure to announce the launching of the Women and Sustainable Development platform on the 27th March in Majunga, Madagascar. On 25 and 26 March, the IOC is organising a Regional Conference on Food Security in Majunga, Madagascar.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The actions of the IOC should continue. This is a new intervention program that we will work for the period 2013-2017. Changing attitudes, give women the place that is theirs, that is to say, on an equal footing with men to end violence is a long process in which the IOC will spare no effort.

To do this we know we can count on the solidarity and support of our ongoing and active technical and financial partners. We thank them.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Her Excellency Dr Nokwe, High Commissioner of the Republic of South Africa for having organised this debate. Your Excellency, your presence among us today shows your commitment for gender equality. We have the opportunity to start a successful collaboration on a theme which is of common interest to us.

I thank the President of the Association of Mauritian women entrepreneurs, Vimi Appadoo, and the Commissioner of the International Federation of Women Entrepreneurs, Aline Wong, with whom we have a long relationship of collaboration.

Thank you