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PRESS RELEASE

Maritime security: Testing coordination for effective joint actions at sea

The Indian Ocean Commission, through the MASE programme funded by the European Union, in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development represented by the *Organe de lutte contre l'Evènement de pollution marine (O.L.E.P)* organised the first **MASE POLMAR 2019** exercise in Diego Suarez, Madagascar from 16 to 20 October 2019.

More than seventy participants took part in this wide-ranging and unprecedented regional exercise, which brought together representatives of the MASE agreements' signatory countries : Comoros, Djibouti, France/Reunion Island, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Somalia as an observer, International Liaison Officers and *watchstanders* from the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) and the Regional Coordination of Operation Centre (RCOC) as well as a representative of the European Navy – EUNAVFOR.

Focus on a scenario based on combatting an accidental marine pollution by hydrocarbons, the **MASE POLMAR 2019** exercise marks the beginning of a series of simulation exercises on other themes related to maritime insecurity. It aims at testing coordination and interoperability between National Centres, the RMIFC and the RCOC which are at the heart of the regional maritime security mechanism set up by the IOC as part of Results 4 and 5 of the MASE programme.

The exercise, which included both a "Chief of Staff" and a "field" component, was organised with the support of the Malagasy National Navy and the Mauritian Coast Guard.

In this respect, this training and exercise phase is a key step in the ramp-up of the two regional centres and the consolidation of the regional maritime security architecture. It enabled the various stakeholders to exchange, not only, on the stages of the operations to promote real synergies, but above all to identify the numerous difficulties on the field that can hinder effective regional cooperation. According to Raj Mohabeer, coordinator of this component, "*We are at a decisive stage in the establishment of a unique state-of-art system designed by IOC with EU financial support for the monitoring and control of the Western Indian Ocean. This will enable us to effectively combat the numerous maritime crimes, which strongly affect the region and also promote the sustainable development of the Blue Economy,*" stressed the IOC Head of mission.

Satisfied with the smooth execution of the exercise, the Chargé d'affaires of the EU Delegation in Madagascar, Serguizs Wolski, highlighted the efforts made by the signatory countries in the implementation of the MASE agreements with the deployment of International Liaison Officer. According to him, "*Regional cooperation is essential because*

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any individual nation alone cannot address the various maritime crimes and threats. Similarly, the need for international cooperation on maritime issues should be enhanced. Hence, the EU support today goes beyond financial support of the MASE programme. The EU also collaborates through the EUNAVFOR – ATALANTA to strengthen regional technical capacities and develop international maritime security cooperation”.

1st Meeting of the Chiefs of Staff of the Signatory countries of the MASE Regional agreements

A special meeting comprising of the Chiefs of Staff or their representatives from the signatory countries of the MASE Regional agreements was organised on the 20th October 2019 in Diego Suarez back to back to the MASE MARPOL Exercise. Representatives of the European Union, the Indian Ocean Commission and Somalia (as observer) also participated in this first meeting. Co-chaired by the representative of Madagascar, the EU and IOC, the meeting aimed, on one hand, at taking stock of the progress made for the implementation of the regional agreements, the deployment of the International Liaison Officers and the outcomes of the Regional Exercise. And on the other hand, to encourage a joint reflection on the process and facilitation for the deployment of resources within the framework of a regional mission, whether at logistical level and/or the numerous authorisations required to carry out a smooth joint operation at sea.

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