



IOC-EU: facing the crisis, working together for the future

The Covid-19 pandemic is turning the world upside down. It reminds us that globalisation also brings with it global epidemic risks, and, above all, that health is a precious commodity that conditions our future.

All major powers, including the European Union (EU), the world's largest trading power, are severely affected. The South-West Indian Ocean islands in particular are even more vulnerable. Health systems are under pressure and the post-Covid question arises everywhere.

The only valid answer is that of solidarity, transparency, and cooperation. In short, that of trusting partnerships. The Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and the European Union (EU) have been working together for more than 35 years for sustainable development in the region. In this context of crisis, our partnership needs to demonstrate its practical utility to meet the challenges posed by this global crisis.

Today, almost half of humanity is confined whilst the majority of industries and services are at a standstill. There is a global recession looming, and the economic consequences will create a definite social burden. This is why it is necessary and urgent to think about recovery.

The role of the private sector is essential. The support to be provided, in order to preserve employment and the socio-economic fabric, must necessarily take into account small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), women entrepreneurs and young people, who are all particularly vulnerable to the impact of the epidemic.

The EU and the IOC intend to participate in the recovery efforts by focusing on the small and medium entrepreneurs in IOC Member States. Our joint action will aim to respond to the SMEs' and entrepreneurs' difficulties due to the pandemic. It will also aim to promote innovation, the creation of jobs and wealth, to support operational capacities on a regional or even international scale, to improve their competitiveness, and all this, from the perspective of genuinely sustainable, responsible and resilient development.

The EU Delegation and the General Secretariat of the IOC have therefore decided to move quickly in the effective implementation of the project "Enhancing Entrepreneurship and Business Cooperation for the Indian Ocean region" signed last March in the context of the 34th Council of Ministers of the IOC. This commitment expresses our will to direct our actions in support of IOC Member States during this troubled period.

We will support SMEs run by women and young people. We would like to focus on the ones that offer green solutions and those that operate in sectors that value local potential by promoting the advantages of the South West Indian Ocean region (tourism, marine products, natural cosmetics, etc.). To this end, our action will focus on three main areas: building the capacity of entrepreneurs (training, monitoring, support); giving access to funding opportunities, and setting up a European trade information centre in the Indian Ocean.

This joint action is in line not only with the global dynamics of post-Covid recovery efforts but also with our common commitment to support the achievement of the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



This IOC-EU project, which will be operational in the fourth quarter of this year, will complement economic policy measures taken at national level. It will further demonstrate the added value of regional cooperation carried by the IOC and the contribution of EU public aid to the development of the region.

We had also decided, several weeks ago, to highlight the EU-IOC partnership during Europe Week through an exhibition and a series of conferences open to the public. Our objective was to demonstrate the relevance and the concrete impact for the citizens of our partnership of more than 35 years. The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted our plans. It encouraged us to think about how our partnership could help economic policies at national and regional levels. It led us to discuss the obvious interest of a new cooperation in health, one of the few sectors which is not covered by the rich and diversified EU-IOC partnership.

This is why the EU is assessing ways to provide additional support to the IOC Epidemic Monitoring and Alert Management network (SEGA-One Health), the decade-long support of the French Development Agency through their health surveillance projects named RSIE. The SEGA-One Health network is the sentinel as well as the operational arm of the IOC in matters of public health. In this period of crisis, the IOC, which has put in place emergency plans adapted to the needs of its Member States, relies on the SEGA-One Health network. Exchanging information, monitoring and assessing risks, pooling resources, equipping and training are all essential actions to which the EU wishes to contribute for the benefit of the IOC and its Member States.

From the coasts of Europe to the shores of the Indian Ocean, we agree that it is time: time to act together in the face of a common enemy, time to focus on our recovery towards a peaceful future. Now is the time for solidarity as it always has been between the IOC and the EU.

VINCENT DEGERT

AMBASSADOR OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

HAMADA MADI

GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE IOC