



Speech of Mr Vincent Degert, Ambassador of the European Union to Mauritius and Seychelles

Prevention and preparedness against marine pollution in Western Indian Ocean under the MASE Programme - 5 May 2021 @ 9.30 am

Mr Marimoutou, Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission,

Mr Dabidin, Secretary for Home Affairs, Prime Minister's Office, Mauritius, and Chairperson of the Steering Committee for the governance of the two Regional Maritime Centres under MASE,

Distinguished representatives from Comoros, Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Reunion, Seychelles, South Africa, Somalia and Tanzania,

Representatives of the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre, RMIFC, in Madagascar and the Regional Coordination Operations Centre, RCOC, in Seychelles,

Representatives from the Nairobi Convention and from the International Maritime Organization

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning to all of you,

I am very pleased to be here today to have the opportunity to say a few words about a very important issue of concern to all of us - How to prevent and prepare against maritime pollution in the Western Indian Ocean region?

I would like first to express my deep appreciation to the Indian Ocean Commission for organising this meeting under the EU partnership programme, MASE, with the participation of countries of the Western Indian Ocean region.

This partnership has already achieved significant milestones> Let me underline three of them:

- (a) The signature of two MASE regional Agreements with seven countries of the region, one for sharing of information and the other for regional coordinated actions at sea.
- (b) The setting up as well as the Operationalisation of two regional maritime centres, namely the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre, RMIFC, in Madagascar and the Regional Coordination Operations Centre, RCOC, in Seychelles and
- (c) The regional pilot operations at sea to test and learn to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional maritime security architecture.

This Regional Maritime Security governance architecture in this part of the Indian Ocean is quite unique in Africa; it embraces a collaborative regional commitment and effort from all of



us in addressing the challenges related to various types of maritime crimes including maritime pollution.

This is why the European Union is providing all its support under various regional programmes and mechanisms, including the EU NAVFOR, to enhance the capacity of the countries of the region as well as the capacities of the RMIFC and of the RCOC in maritime domain awareness to be able to respond effectively to increasing challenges. Expectations are high and taxpayers and civil society in the EU and on the IO want to see that efficient solutions are put in place to respond to these tough challenges.

The importance of the ocean to the people of the Western Indian Ocean region cannot be overstated. As you are all aware, the Western Indian Ocean is home to many of the world's most significant shipping lanes. This region is also increasingly becoming an international shipping route for crude oil as more offshore oil deposits are exploited. Thus, the risk of major spill runs high if contingency plans to improve preparedness and response are not implemented.

There can be no healthy economic future for the countries of the Western Indian Ocean without protecting, without preventing and without restoring ecosystems and habitats that underpin industries like sustainable fishing and of course tourism.

The focus should be on preventing and mitigating the risk of pollution caused by oil or other hazardous substances, which very often have impacts going beyond national jurisdictions.

We have all witnessed the July 2020 grounding of the vessel MV Wakashio, off the coast of Mauritius; it drew worldwide attention to the inadequate of country preparedness and response arrangements to oil spills and other hazardous marine pollution incidents.

As parties to international conventions, countries have, as we know, a legal obligation to organise and prepare their response to major marine pollution incidents; they are required to make efforts at national, at sub-regional and at regional levels in this regard.

However, the wrecked MV Wakashio and the devastating oil pollution that followed showed that the mere step of activating a national oil spill contingency plan could not stop the far-reaching and harmful impacts to the marine environment.

This incident must bring home to us all about the urgency of the problem; it raises questions as to whether countries' national contingency plans are sufficient, and what makes a country or region sufficiently equipped to respond to marine pollution incidents.

It is also important to remind ourselves that the operationalisation of the two regional maritime centres that have international liaison officers of the MASE signatory countries already posted is to act as a whistle-blower to alert the national maritime centres and respective coastguards to unleash preventive measures to such types of incidents even when incidents occur during week-ends.



The key lessons learnt from this oil spill still need to be drawn and should be carried by each responsible organization; preliminary assessments point to several elements:

- National preparedness and response systems are the bedrock of regional cooperation.
- A regional mechanism is required to implement effective cooperation.
- A Regional Contingency Plan should form part of the regional mechanism, providing coordination procedures between national systems.
- A regional training and exercise programme is definitively needed to develop and sustain the regional mechanism. This should be periodic and not ad-hoc.
- Finally there is a need for a 24/7 coordination and communication between the regional maritime centres and the respective national maritime centres to enhance maritime domain awareness and to develop an effective preventive and preparedness response.

I am aware of the daunting task awaiting you, but it is more than important to ensure an effective articulation and synergy between the national oil spill plan and the regional contingency plan with clearly defined and established procedures. Otherwise, there would be delays for both national commitment and buy-in of policy makers as well as coordination at regional level for an effective regional response capability.

While at times 'response' is not always clearly defined, it is important that you ponder over the minimum capability required to respond to an incident with suitable equipment, sufficient logistics and competent, trained responders supported by proven, exercised plans. These are all indispensable prerequisites for efficient regional cooperation and mutual assistance.

This is why the European Union is supporting the initiative of the IOC and countries of this region to work towards a regional collective approach for preparedness to marine pollution including oil spills and other hazardous pollution incidents with the required table-top exercises to test the regional coordination mechanism.

I would like to seize this opportunity to inform you that the EU is also complementing the MASE support with the implementation of a Port Security Programme for this region; this is done in collaboration with key implementing agencies notably IMO, UNODC and Interpol. Under this programme, the relevant Port Authorities of the region will benefit directly from technical support to undertake Port State Control Inspections on board of vessels to address the issues of sub-standard vessels that is also very often a source of marine pollution.

Let me also highlight the good initiative undertaken by the Indian Ocean Commission to bring all the countries of the Western Indian Ocean under one roof; it involves even those who have not yet signed the MASE agreements and it is open for more partners, to collaborate under the MASE programme for reviewing the national and regional contingency plans.



European Union Delegation
to the Republic of Mauritius
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I would also like to convey my appreciation for the participation of the IMO and the Nairobi Convention focal points responsible for oil spill preparedness to facilitate the operationalisation and implementation of the Regional Contingency Plan within the MASE Regional Maritime Security governance architecture; this is critical to avoid duplication of existing resources and to align with the Nairobi Convention's Emergency Protocol.

I wish you all fruitful discussions in finalising the roadmap and thank you for your kind attention. We are not allowed to fail. The public would not understand.