

Ministry of External Affairs
Indo-Pacific Division

**Intervention for 35th Meeting of Council of Ministers
of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC COM)**

Date : May 20, 2021

Mode: Virtual

Delivered by: H.E. Mrs. K. Nandini Singla, High Commissioner of India to
Mauritius

Your Excellency, the Prime Minister, Acting President of the Union of the Comoros,
Excellencies, President and members of the Council of Ministers of the Member States of the Indian Ocean Commission,
Observer members and partners of the IOC,
Your Excellency, the Secretary General of the IOC,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen, all protocol observed,

It is my honour and privilege to address this august gathering. This is the first Council of Ministers meeting for India after being accepted as an Observer at the Indian Ocean Commission. On behalf of the Government and People of India, let me express my heartfelt appreciation to the IOC Member States for welcoming India in the IOC as an Observer. I also extend a warm welcome to other new observers at the IOC, namely, Japan and the United Nations.

Excellencies,

The Indian Ocean Region is of vital importance to India. Located at the crossroads of the Indian Ocean, India has had a long maritime tradition, which has helped to forge commercial, cultural and religious links with countries in the region over centuries.

In recent times, the Indian Ocean has served as an engine for growth and prosperity. Over 90% of our trade passes through this region. India has an extensive coastline of 7500 km and several hundred islands located between Lakshadweep on the West and Andaman & Nicobar Islands on the East. The Indian Ocean is also rich in natural resources and bio-diversity.

It is therefore of utmost importance that these waters remain safe and secure. This was enunciated by Prime Minister Modi in March 2015 when he put forward the concept of SAGAR or "Security and Growth for All in the Region".

SAGAR underpins our vision of the Indian Ocean region and the greater Indo-Pacific, as a region of peace & prosperity, based on a climate of trust and transparency, respect for international maritime rules, sensitivity to each other's interests, peaceful resolution of disputes and enhanced maritime cooperation. A rules-based order will ensure that all have equal access as a right under international law to the use of common spaces such as the sea and air.

Excellencies,

The Indian Ocean Commission is one of the oldest and leading multilateral organisations in the Indian Ocean Region. It has achieved commendable success under the four Axes identified for cooperation, namely, Peace and Security; Enhanced Economic Integration; Environment and Sustainable Development; and Human development. These are areas to which India attaches great importance and where India is closely cooperating with countries in the Indian Ocean Region, including members of the IOC. There is an evident synergy in the activities undertaken by IOC and India in the context of the Indian Ocean. Through its association with the IOC as an Observer, India would be able to contribute to the Commission's overall objectives in the identified areas of regional cooperation. We would like to work together with IOC on our shared priorities and build complementarities with our bilateral and regional initiatives in the Indian Ocean Region.

With these underlying objectives, we look forward to work with IOC in several priority areas. For example, in the area of Maritime Safety and Security, we would like to depute an Indian Liaison Officer at the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre in Madagascar for greater coordination and sharing information. A safer Indian Ocean would complement our efforts to promote greater regional connectivity through various initiatives.

In the area of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), India has good experience as a first responder in providing disaster relief to countries in the region. We hope to explore cooperation with IOC in this area. In recent times, India has also provided COVID relief in the form of medicines, medical supplies and vaccines to countries of the Indian Ocean Region. We have a Tsunami Early Warning System in the Indian Ocean and have taken the lead in evolving common guidelines for HADR and Search and Rescue in the Indian Ocean region. We are also collaborating with interested countries for promoting resilient infrastructure to support sustainable development under the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI).

Environmental protection, conservation of bio-diversity and climate action is another focus area for India in the Indian Ocean region. India is today one of the few countries, which is on track to meet its mitigation commitments under the Paris Agreement. We see great scope for cooperation with IOC on Climate Change and promotion of Blue Economy, including sustainable development of ocean resources, coastal communities, fisheries and tourism.

India has long history of cultural and people-to-people exchanges with the Indian Ocean Region countries. We would like to further strengthen this people-to-people connect by expanding exchanges among youth, women, media, artists, academics, scholars, etc. We look forward to working with the IOC in the area of training & capacity building, for promoting institutional linkages between think tanks and universities, enhancing academic collaborations and R&D activities.

Excellencies,

India's pivot to the Indian Ocean region is natural, given its geography and shared historical and cultural heritage. India is actively involved in various regional organizations in the Indian Ocean Region and the wider Indo-Pacific, including the Indian Ocean Rim Association, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), BIMSTEC and all the way to ASEAN. We would be happy to broaden cooperation among various regional mechanisms of the Indian Ocean Region and work for optimum utilisation of available resources to ensure security and growth for all in the region.

Excellencies,

As you may be aware, in 2019, India announced the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI) as a collaborative endeavour for countries to work together towards cooperative solutions to common challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, of which the Indian Ocean is an intrinsic part. The IPOI envisages a free, open, inclusive and rules based Indo-Pacific, and focuses on seven central pillars of cooperation covering Maritime Security; Marine Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building & Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction & Management; Science, Technology & Academic Cooperation; and Trade, Connectivity & Maritime Transport. These seven pillars have great resonance with the priority areas of IOC and we would be happy to collaborate with IOC in further building upon this convergence.

Excellencies,

Before I conclude, I would like to reiterate India's commitment to work with the IOC in a spirit of multilateralism and solidarity, and exploit the full potential of our cooperation. Our approach will always be guided by Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam or the World is one family.

Thank you
