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## **Ministerial Declaration**

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security and Safety in the Western Indian Ocean**

*Balaclava, Republic of Mauritius – 16 November 2023*

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#### **Preamble**

***Recalling*** the adopted Declarations of the 2018 and 2019 Ministerial Conferences on Maritime Security in the Western Indian Ocean;

***Recognizing*** the need for the strengthening, the consolidation and the expansion of the Western Indian Ocean Regional Maritime Security Architecture as a prerequisite and key mechanism for the development of the ocean/blue economy and the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area as well as for the prevention, reduction and coordinated response to risks, offences and crimes at sea, particularly with regard to marine and coastal ecosystems;

***Considering*** the obligation of State Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to adhere to the Convention Articles and Resolutions ensuring that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species and that illegal trade of species listed under the Convention is prevented;

***Considering*** the Moroni “Blue Future” Ministerial Declaration on Climate Action and Blue Economy in Africa of 14 June 2023.

***Acknowledging*** the interest exhibited by land-linked African Countries and actively participating in the Maritime Security and Safety Conference; and looking a unique opportunity for these Nations to bridge the existing knowledge gaps, strengthen their policy, legal and institutional frameworks and leap up cooperation with countries in the Maritime Domain.

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**We, the Ministers and Representatives of the participating States and Organisations at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security and Safety in the Western Indian Ocean held on 16 November 2023, in Balaclava, Republic of Mauritius agree to the following:**

#### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Status of implementation of the outcomes of the last two Ministerial conferences and way forward**

1. The Conference recognises that the outcomes of the Ministerial Conferences require a regionally led, co-ordinated and complementary maritime security and safety mechanism as a deterrence against transboundary illicit and criminal activities at sea.

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2. The Conference recognises that maritime security and safety require collective efforts. It further recognises that national maritime capability is the bedrock of any regional mechanism which should be based on collective responsibility.
  3. The Conference takes note of the steps to implement the outcomes of the previous Conferences towards a strong, modern and regionally owned maritime security and safety architecture with the support of the European Union and regional and international partners.
  4. The Conference commends the following:
    - a) The operationalization of:
      - i. the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) towards a comprehensive maritime picture of the Western Indian Ocean, which eventually will enable each participating country to determine its area of interest and vessels of interest;
      - ii. the Regional Coordination of Operations Centre (RCOC) which significantly improves regional maritime capability, and operational readiness, and legal response with the support of other international actors; and
      - iii. the Conference calls upon key international actors in this area to provide sustained support in this regard.
    - b) The continued support of the RMIFC and RCOC's host countries, Madagascar and Seychelles, as per the respective host agreements. The Conference also calls upon key international actors in this area to provide additional support in this regard.
    - c) Efforts by the Djibouti Code of Conduct - Jeddah Amendments (DCoC/JA) in establishing an Information Sharing Network and the development of a strategy for its operationalization that includes Standard Operating Procedures. The Conference further recognizes the concerted efforts by the DCoC Signatory States to support the RMIFC and RCOC with a view to including them as part of the DCoC Information Sharing Network. This collaboration is intended to facilitate the achievement of mutual objectives related to the development of a robust information sharing network and operational coordination at sea in the Western Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden.
    - d) Partnerships established through the signature of co-operation agreements of the maritime security and safety architecture Centres (RMIFC-RCOC) with Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), International Maritime Organisation (IMO), Operation EUNAVFOR Atalanta and United Kingdom.
  5. The Conference takes good note of the call of the MASE Agreements Signatory States to widen collaboration and deepen the Regional Maritime Security Architecture. To this
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end, they call upon Coastal States of the Indian Ocean to sign these Agreements and other States and Organisations to join as Partners.

6. The Conference acknowledges major and longstanding support of the European Union to the strengthening of maritime and port security in the Western Indian Ocean through the MASE Programme, the Operation EUNAVFOR ATALANTA, the Port Security and Safety of Navigation Programme in the Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and Indian Ocean region, the CRIMARIO project, and the upcoming Safe Seas Africa programme. The Conference also acknowledges contributions by other International Partners to support maritime security and calls for additional and closely coordinated support.
7. The challenges in ensuring maritime security and safety are complex. There is a need to improve multi-agency co-ordination at the national and regional levels and to bring those impacted up to recognized international standards. The Conference commends those countries in the region that have already established and operationalised their National Information Sharing Mechanism, and calls upon those countries without such a mechanism to establish and operationalise same no later than March 2024 as per DCoC / Information Sharing Network (DCoC/ISN) Strategy and Roadmap. The Conference further commends the decision of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), the maritime security and safety architecture and DCoC/JA to work together on information exchange and coordinated actions at sea. The Conference recognises the need for promoting the transfer of technology and know-how, technical assistance, and adequate capacity building on human resources development. The Conference invites countries of the region to rely on the regional maritime training centre (DRTC). The Conference recommends the regional States to establish national Maritime Security and Safety Strategies (MSSS) and commit to their full operationalisation.
8. With a view to reinforcing maritime and port security in the region, the Conference calls on States in the region to finalise legal finish for maritime and port-based crime, and to take the necessary steps to review their domestic legislative frameworks as appropriate. The Conference commends Seychelles for its leadership in this area by finalising a legal finish agreement with the European Union.
9. Given that maritime security and safety in the Western Indian Ocean is impacted by events and activities in the wider region, the Conference recommends a more co-ordinated and coherent approach to ensure maritime security and safety in the Eastern Africa-Southern Africa and Indian Ocean.

### **Combat against drugs and other illicit trafficking**

10. Recognising that Drugs Trafficking and Substance Abuse is a global challenge and has serious health, social and economic consequences, the Conference reaffirms the need for co-operation at the national, regional, and international levels to fight this challenge.
11. The Conference strongly supports the work of the Regional Architecture for Maritime Security for the fight against drug trafficking and calls for strengthened and effective

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collaboration with the RMIFC for identification of vessels of interests and RCOC for co-ordination of intervention at sea, followed by inspection.

12. The Conference commends the organization of the first Regional Conference on Drugs and Substance Abuse in Mauritius in April 2023. The conference recommends the implementation of the agreed outcomes aimed at addressing illicit drugs and substance abuse, based on a regional integrated strategy, notably the establishment of a regional as well as an international co-operation framework, of a network of national structures in charge for drugs traffic and substance abuse and regional drug observatory, at the earliest. The Conference welcomes the proposal of Mauritius to host a Ministerial Conference against Drugs Trafficking and Substance Abuse in 2024.
13. The Conference encourages continued efforts to promote regional co-operation to counter illicit drug trafficking at sea through UNODC led initiatives including the Southern Route Partnership, work of the Trilateral Planning Cell and maintaining connections between the Northern and Southern transit zones of the Southern Route.

#### **Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities (CGIMA)**

14. The Conference commends Kenya and previous leaderships for leading past efforts to combat piracy and recommends that the momentum of the good work done in this area be maintained beyond the issue of piracy in a strategic approach, whilst avoiding duplication with existing mechanisms and architecture (DCOC/JA, MASE).

#### **Prevention and preparedness against marine pollution**

15. Recent events have demonstrated the need for coordinated actions to address marine pollution given limited technical, human and financial resources at the national level.
16. The Conference commends the collective work undertaken by the IOC to enhance preparedness at the regional level to respond effectively to marine pollution through the organization of a Tabletop Exercise and Field Training Exercise in July and September 2023 respectively. A regional oil spill contingency plan is being elaborated which aims to pool the limited resources available in the region and access international support to effectively act on a pollution event as fast as possible.
17. The Conference supports the avoidance of a multiplicity of actions and supports a coordinated and coherent approach to the effective establishment of a practical and sustainable regional/international co-operation mechanism for the prevention and preparedness against marine pollution for the Western Indian Ocean. This may include:
  - a) Support to a dedicated Programme towards the achievement of the above. This Programme should include work towards the establishment of a regional/international technical and human resource capability for escalating response to significant pollution incidents on the basis of an agreed mechanism.

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This includes availability and willingness for provision of equipment and manpower suitable for the requirements to deal with a pollution incident in the region as per a request from an affected country;

- b) Providing key information that can be utilized during incidents or exercises for prevention, risk mitigation and salvage capabilities in the region (such as response personnel and inventory of response equipment, products and other means) to be included in informational Annexes of the Regional Contingency Plan. In this regard, the Conference notes that the IOC has initiated a study for the establishment of an online directory of regional and international partners which will be regularly updated;
- c) Support for capacity building for auditing equipment, logistical, personnel and technical resources available within countries to respond to pollution incidents, identifying and accessing the 'tools' (coordination and information sharing platform, satellite imagery, oil spill modelling, metocean data etc...) that are needed during a response, financial procedures for requesting and offering assistance, the verification of the condition of equipment and maintenance as well as organisation of national and regional exercises, developing and maintaining working relations with potential 'incident stakeholders' (shipowners, vessel insurers, their technical advisors, International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund, IMO, EU, salvors, offshore installation operators and spill response organizations) that can be established to ensure a coordinated response including the issue of adequate compensation subject to domestic laws and regulations; and
- d) Implementation of annual Field Training Exercise and commends the decision for the next one to be held in Mombasa, Kenya, in 2024.

### **Improving Ports Security and Safety of Navigation**

- 18. The Conference recognises the Western Indian Ocean as one of the busiest maritime routes and its importance for global trade and economy in terms of cargo traffic and oil shipment.
- 19. The Conference views with great interest and encourages the collective work of the European Union, IMO, INTERPOL and UNODC and the IOC to improve ports security and safety of navigation towards the formulation and adoption of a Regional Policy on Ports Security and Safety of Navigation, under the EU-funded Port Security and Safety of Navigation in Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and Indian Ocean Region Programme.
- 20. The Conference commends the IOC to organise a Ministerial Conference on Port Security and Safety of Navigation in 2024.

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### **Initiating an African Coast Guards Functions Forum**

21. The Conference takes good note of the outcome of the June 2023 Moroni “Blue Future” Declaration and the initiative to establish an annual African Coast Guard Functions Forum in partnership with intergovernmental organisations and regional economic communities.
22. The Conference supports the sharing of experience and developing co-operation among neighbouring institutions in charge for surveillance and operations at sea.
23. The Coast Guard Global Summit hosted by Japan acts as a global platform for dialogue and cooperation of the world’s Coast Guards. The proposed African Coast Guards Functions Forum will contribute to the efforts of the Coast Guard Global Summit.
24. The Conference welcomes the technical assistance to be provided by the Italian Coast Guard, as the Chair of the Mediterranean Coast Guard Functions Forum, for the establishment of the African Coast Guard Functions Forum.
25. The Conference commends the proposals of the Republic of Kenya for hosting the first African Coast Guard Functions Forum.
26. The Conference invites all concerned stakeholders to work towards the establishment of an African Coast Guards Functions Forum and agree on the modalities of its setting up.

### **Trafficking in Wildlife**

27. The Conference recognises that combatting illegal wildlife trade requires a concerted and collective efforts amongst CITES State Parties along maritime trade routes and/or corridors in the Western Indian Ocean to ensure survival of threatened species of wild flora and fauna and counteract the environmental and economic impact of illegal wildlife trade.
28. The Conference commends the collaboration amongst TRAFFIC, Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange platforms (TWIX), International Union for Conservation of Nature and the IOC and the adoption of a Plan of Work in January 2023 at the regional meeting in Mauritius. The Plan addresses four thematic areas, including legal aspects in relation to CITES, improved data base and analysis, detection and identification and management of seized species, each of which along four planks of actions: sharing of information, build capacity and raise awareness, coordinate efforts and investigation and update and harmonise legislation.
29. The Conference calls for support for strengthened partnership and the full implementation of the Plan of Work.

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30. We, the Ministers and Representatives of participating States and Organisations:

- a) are encouraged to support the various initiatives discussed at this Ministerial Conference;
- b) strongly encourage all participating States and organisations to implement the recommendations of the present Declaration; and
- c) commend the Republic of Mauritius for organizing this high-level meeting on maritime security and safety issues in the Western Indian Ocean.

This Ministerial Declaration on Maritime Security and Safety in the Western Indian Ocean is adopted by acclamation this 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at BalACLava, Republic of Mauritius.