

Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security

New agreements, actions and political commitment for regional Maritime Security

April 29, 2018, Intercontinental Hotel, Balaclava - "It was a success!" according to, the Minister of Justice of Mauritius, Maneesh Gobin, who chaired the Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security, on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Seetanah Lutchmeenaraidoo.

Since Thursday April 26, more than 180 delegates, including Defence, Interior and Foreign Affairs ministers as well as senior officials from multilateral institutions, coming from some 40 States and regional and international organizations, attended this Ministerial Conference, jointly organized by the Indian Ocean Commission and the Republic of Mauritius, with the support of the European Union, observer to the IOC.

The event led to the signing of four agreements on enhanced cooperation between States for improved Maritime Security in the Western Indian Ocean region. Two major agreements were signed under the regional Maritime Security programme (MASE, **MA**ritime **SE**curity): the first deals with the exchange and sharing of maritime information through Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) based in Madagascar; the second concerns the coordination of joint operations through the Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC) based in the Seychelles.

The two MASE agreements were signed by the Union of the Comoros, the Republic of Mauritius, the Republic of Madagascar, the Republic of Seychelles and the Republic of Djibouti. Other States in the region are expected to adopt these agreements, which remain open to partners wishing to contribute to regional Maritime Security, a prerequisite to ensure stability of these world-wide maritime routes.

During the Conference's Official Opening Ceremony, Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, who witnessed the signing of cooperation agreements between the IOC and the Republic of Mauritius with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on the fight against illegal trafficking, stressed on the link between Security and Development. "*As small islands, often devoid of land based natural resources, we aspire to develop our vast maritime spaces and build a new chapter for our economies around the ocean. For this to materialise our seas need to be safe and we need to unlock the required resources to do so,*" he insisted.

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The Prime Minister added: "Alone, none of our countries can fight the illegal traffic in our oceans, the spoliation of our seas or the growing threats to insecurity in our waters. Even collectively, the challenges are major issues. But if we can agree on ways and means to work together and to share information and coordinate our actions, we can surely do better than we are doing now. Let us join forces to make this happen."

While there is an increasing focus on the Ocean Economy, the seas are indeed the ideal place for all kinds of crimes, traffics and threats. The Ministerial Declaration of the Eastern and Southern African States and Indian Ocean, adopted at the end of the conference also renewed the region's commitment to cooperate in the fight against crimes and threats. It also underlines the importance of partnerships with the International Community.

According to Hamada Madi, Secretary General of the IOC, *"The action of a State to combat all crimes and threats at sea, depends on its political willingness. It is this political will that define the scope of our cooperation so that each of our Member States can truly benefit from a new and sustainable growth based on the potential of our oceans."*

The European Union, first development partner of the region and funder of the MASE programme, has indicated its continuous support to the Western Indian Ocean States. The Ambassador and Head of the European Union Delegation, Marjaana Sall, thus announced *"an additional funding of € 5 million from the European Union to support the operationalization of the regional RMIFC in Madagascar and the RCOC in Seychelles."* In addition, other fundings are announced for sectors such as fisheries, safety and port security, or even the fight against the effects of climate change, she said.

The Mauritian Attorney General, Maneesh Gobin, concluded: *"The ocean that we share is the new frontier of development for the islands of the region and the States of the greater region of Eastern and Southern Africa. What we have done here for 4 days is precisely aimed at ensuring the future of our countries, which depends on securing our maritime areas. We are pleased that we can count on the partnerships and the support of the European Union, on Japan through its participation in UNODC activities, through its partnership with the IOC, and on China, observer member of the IOC, among others."*

25 states from the region or with commercial and economic interests in the region, including the Union of Comoros, Seychelles, Madagascar, Uganda, Djibouti, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, France, Great Britain, Sri Lanka, the United States, Saudi Arabia, China and India were represented at the conference. Similarly, 17 economic and political organizations such as COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa), Intergovernmental Authority on

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Development (IGAD) and East African Community (EAC), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the European Union participated in the conference.

Contacts

IOC Communication Unit

- Pascaline Alexandre, MASE Programme Communications Officer : (+230) 57 56 52 67 / pascaline.alexandre@coi-ioc.org
- Gilles Ribouet, IOC Head of Communications: (+230) 59 10 14 48 / gilles.ribouet@coi-ioc.org
- Office: (+230) 402 61 00 / communication@coi-ioc.org

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade

Akilesh Roopun : (+230) 52 54 92 34 / aroopun@govmu.org

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