

**THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

**OPENING OF THE
3RD MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON
MARITIME SECURITY AND SAFETY**

**SPEECH BY HON PRAVIND KUMAR JUGNAUTH
PRIME MINISTER**

THURSDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2023 AT 0900HRS

**VENUE: INTERCONTINENTAL MAURITIUS HOTEL
BALACLAVA**

Colleague Ministers,

The Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission,

The Director General, United Nations Office at Nairobi,

Heads of Delegation and Representatives of Regional and International Organisations,

Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Respected Participants,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

It gives me an immense pleasure to welcome you all to Mauritius for the third Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security and Safety, after a three-year spell, disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The maritime sector; like many other sectors as a matter of fact, is roving through substantial changes, triggered by factors which are mostly beyond our control. We are duty-bound together to pursue this voyage towards ensuring a sustainable maritime sector, free from threats and tension.

Our gathering today is testimony to the importance that we all attach to maritime security and it reflects our collective commitment, as one community, to ensure safe and secure seas at a time when, for various reasons, maritime security concerns in this region have intensified.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We must start from a candid and a forthright approach. Firstly, despite our relentless efforts, the capability to address the vast scale of existing or potential threats in our region remains rather modest. Secondly, the sheer magnitude of such threats carry the risks of undermining the stability of our critical waterways in the region.

Strategic competition among States; transnational issues such as illicit and criminal activities, including illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; terrorism, drugs, arms and human trafficking; waste dumping; just to mention a few, are tremendous challenges facing the Western Indian Ocean.

I hardly need to impress on the fact that oceans around our globe, including our own, are already under heavy stress from over-exploitation, pollution, declining biodiversity, and climate change.

We cannot deal with such challenges individually and in isolation from each other. It is imperative that we join our hands together and cooperate at all desired levels along with the greatest number of goodwill stakeholders in this critical area.

There can be no significant improvement in maritime capability without the enduring and committed support of the international community, including our development cooperation partners who, like us, have vital stakes in our cherished ocean.

We need to continue to emphasise on the huge merits for growing the blue economy in a sustainable, inclusive, and people centred manner.

Indeed, the global recognition of the promises of the blue economy has forged a regional vision which would make this sector a major driver for balanced economic development in our region while generating employment, ensuring food security, alleviating poverty, and fostering sustainable business and economic models in our ocean.

Once again, common vision and ambition, best practices and above all, the optimum use of existing and innovative financial instruments and mechanisms are key for the successful harnessing of our ocean resources.

With this perspective in mind, Mauritius remains strongly committed to provide a Ministerial platform for all parties to reflect, discuss, and make recommendations on how, together, we can progress and achieve our shared objectives.

The fight against piracy bears testimony to the success of our collaboration both at regional and international level.

Measures put in place collectively such as patrolling of the seas and legal frameworks have largely contributed to curb down piracy. This has also paved the way for joint collaboration to address other maritime security issues.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I commend the transformation of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia into the Contact Group on Illicit Marine Activities.

Whilst piracy in our region has been on the decline, the rise in illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and drug trafficking do pose a considerable potential for another wave of maritime insecurity within our region.

I am happy to acknowledge the presence of the Representative of the Government of the Republic of Kenya which has taken a very commendable leadership on this transformation process.

I am confident that during today's deliberations and discussions, we will devote time to focus on how to best advance the work of this group with a new mandate but with the same sense of urgency and commitment.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The past two Ministerial Conferences in 2018 and 2019 have been instrumental in preparing the ground for us to act together. Unfortunately, unforeseen and unprecedented challenges have prevented us from meeting earlier. It is, therefore, important that we build on and leverage on the outcomes of these conferences.

A very critical issue on our agenda is the threat of maritime incidents at sea, including oil spills. The threat is omnipresent given that the Indian Ocean is an important transit route for maritime traffic. The unfortunate incident of the grounding of the MV Wakashio in Mauritius has been a wake-up call for all of us.

I am, therefore, happy to note the emergence of a collective mechanism for prevention and preparedness against marine pollution in the region.

The recent oil spill simulation exercise organised by the Indian Ocean Commission, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade has provided a solid foundation for establishing a regional and international framework to face oil spills.

I also commend Kenya for proposing to host the next field training exercise in 2024. I have been informed of a study which will be undertaken to address logistical needs to ensure an adequate preparedness for response to oil spill incidents.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

According to estimates from the United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime, an alarming amount of several thousand tons of heroine and other drugs transit through our continent to other parts of the world.

The first conference on substance abuse organised by Mauritius, with the support of the Indian Ocean Commission in May this year should give rise to a global coalition to fight this scourge.

I call on to the United Nations to assist us in addressing this pressing issue whilst reiterating our gratitude to the European Union for the Maritime Security Programme, and for providing the resources needed to enhance maritime security in our region.

At our own National level, we are relentless in our sheer determination to fight this menace. A Commission of Enquiry was set up to dwell into the depth of this issue and we remain committed to track down drug traffickers and those who have built their wealth on ruined lives.

I fully support the recommendations of the first regional conference on drugs which aim to provide a new boost to the fight against drug trafficking. Mauritius is looking forward to host the next Ministerial conference on drugs and substance abuse next year, which will allow us to follow-up on the current recommendations.

As regards wildlife trafficking, it is worrying to note that illegal trafficking and unsustainable trade are causing unprecedented declines in some of our planet's most charismatic as well as in some lesser-known wildlife species. I hope that there has been a good response to the commendable initiative of the Indian Ocean Commission and TRAFFIC, a leading non-governmental organisation, which organised a regional meeting in January this year and also proposed an Action Plan to address the issue.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The enhancement of Maritime Security in our region depends greatly on the strengthening of port security as well as the consolidation of maritime safety management systems in our harbours. The proposal to formulate a Regional Policy on Ports Security and Safety of Navigation, is indeed fitting and long overdue.

Before ending, I would like to put on record the excellent work carried out by the Coast Guards of our region for the promotion and the upholding of Maritime security. The immense contribution of the Union of Comoros during its current Chair of the African Union with regards to the establishment of a regional platform of Coast Guards, is laudable.

I am confident that today's platform itself will also enable neighbouring Coast Guards to develop stronger ties, trust and interoperability between them.

Capacity building, multi-stakeholder approaches and above all, the commitment to deliver on already agreed actions are critical to advance towards our goals and translate initiatives into effective and workable actions.

It is, therefore, essential that the deliberations of this meeting result in strengthened coordination and synergies.

You may rest assured of the support of the Government of Mauritius in this endeavour. We also rely on the International Community for their continued support in maintaining the Indian Ocean as a peaceful and secure place.

On this note, it is my pleasure to declare this Ministerial Conference open. I wish you fruitful deliberations and look forward to concrete and actionable recommendations.

I thank you for your attention.