

**SPEECH BY UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL MS. ZAINAB HAWA BANGURA,
DIRECTOR GENERAL
UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AT NAIROBI (UNON)
REPRESENTING
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

**Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security in the Western Indian Ocean
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Abstract:

DG Bangura speaks about the region's importance and challenges and the UN's alignment with regional frameworks and sustainable development goals to counter these.

Honorable Prime Minister;
Honorable Ministers;
Excellencies;
Distinguish Participants;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

I am delighted to represent the UN Secretary-General who, with regret, cannot be with us at this vital engagement today.

We are gathered here today to ensure the sustainability and peaceful use of the oceans and to safeguard the maritime domain from traditional and evolving threats.

The persisting threats to maritime security and safety are among the multiple challenges facing the world.

In his address to the General Assembly on 19 September 2023, Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said, among other things, that “we have all the tools and resources to solve our shared challenges”. He added that “what we need is determination”.

The third Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security and Safety in the Western and Indian Ocean is an illustration of your collective determination to identify ways and means of advancing multilateralism and cooperation and cementing partnerships for increased stability and prosperity in the region.

In today's globalized world, the Indian Ocean region is geopolitically more important than ever in trade, food, security, and economic prosperity. The United Nations family, led by our excellent Resident Coordinator, Lisa Singh, sees and feels this reality every day.

The Indian Ocean plays a pivotal role in global trade, security, and environmental stability, connecting nations, cultures, and economies.

Its importance in the world is both multidimensional and wide-reaching.

- The Indian Ocean is strategically located at the crossroads of major international shipping routes, connecting the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. It serves as a gateway between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, making it a focal point for global trade and commerce. Quite simply, its security is our security.
- Over 80% of global maritime trade by volume, and 70% by value, passes through the Indian Ocean. Key maritime chokepoints including the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal, and the Strait of Malacca are vital for international trade. The uninterrupted flow of goods through these routes is essential for the global economy - and we have seen the immediate impact on the world when one of these routes is compromised.
- Ocean-based economic activities, including fishing, tourism, shipping, and trade, generate substantial revenue and employment opportunities for coastal and island states around the region. The blue economy is literally lapping at our feet.
- The Indian Ocean is home to diverse and unique ecosystems, including coral reefs and marine biodiversity. Its waters are essential for the world's food

security and the conservation of vulnerable species. On this note, allow me Prime Minister to congratulate you and the Government of Mauritius for being among the first countries to sign, last September, the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction .

- And our Indian Ocean influences climate patterns, particularly the Indian monsoon, which has a profound impact on agriculture and water resources for millions of people. Climate phenomena, such as the Indian Ocean Dipole, and the El Niño-Southern Oscillation, have far-reaching global consequences.

But unfortunately, many of the same qualities that make the Indian Ocean invaluable to the world also present challenges:

- The region is susceptible to natural disasters, including cyclones and tsunamis. Coordinated humanitarian aid and disaster response efforts are critical to mitigating the impact of these events and providing relief to affected communities.
- The region's resources and importance in global trade routes have attracted organized criminals, corrupt actors, and terrorists. Piracy of global shipping, whilst currently suppressed due to our collective efforts, remains a threat to be guarded against. For instance, it is understood that the maritime assets of the Indian Ocean region have made it a hotspot for piracy with the economic cost of piracy estimated at more than USD 1.4 Billion.
- Illegal, unregulated, or unreported fishing threatens the sustainability of regional fisheries, economic development, and food security. With estimated proceeds of more than USD 23 Billion annually, IUU Fishing was recognized in May 2023 at the 9th Indian Ocean Dialogue as one of the most significant maritime security threats, leading to losses of government revenue, employment, fisheries value-chains.

- These same routes that are essential for legitimate trade, also serve as smuggling routes for drugs, weapons, and people. Drug trafficking through the Western Indian Ocean, through a corridor termed as the “Southern Route” accounts for 17 per cent of all global drug seizures and has become a major conduit for illicit maritime flows from which transnational organized crime groups generate considerable revenue. In addition, this Western Indian Ocean maritime route has recently been the subject of increasing flow of irregular migrants and also trafficking in persons.
- Marine Pollution and Maritime Environment crime are also issues of concerns for the region. We have all witnessed the impacts of the MV Wakashio Oil Spill in Mauritius in 2020 on the environment and also on the livelihoods of people.

With an eye toward protecting and building on the region’s resources and value, while at the same time guarding against these challenges, the United Nations takes a broad approach to its interventions in the Indian Ocean, always aligned with our Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and strategic frameworks, such as the African Union’s Agenda 2063.

Indeed, maintaining a safe, secure, and well-governed Indian Ocean will provide essential support to that strategy’s aspirations, which include:

- A Prosperous Africa, based on Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development
- An Africa of Good Governance, Democracy, Respect for Human Rights, Justice, and the Rule of Law
- A Peaceful and Secure Africa
- And an Africa as A Strong, United, Resilient and Influential Global Player and Partner

Excellencies,

The Djibouti Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden, and its Jeddah Amendment, expanded cooperation to counter transnational organized crime in the maritime domain, terrorism, illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing and other illegal activities at sea.

Two key actors within the UN in this space are the International Maritime Organization and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime – UNODC. Working together, and under the guidance of the UN Resident Coordinator, they build capacity and relationships to prevent and prosecute maritime crimes within a sound rule of law framework. Both agencies maintain an active and valuable presence throughout the Indian Ocean region. In addition, other UN Agencies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) are very active in addressing the issue of trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants, maritime pollution and illicit financing and maritime rule of law respectively. We are exceptionally grateful to our host nations and donors.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is our guiding light, developed by you, the Member States we serve.

The interlinkages between the development of the blue economy and the challenges of maritime security call for an integrated approach with the support of the international community. A more secure Indian Ocean is a pre-requisite for the development of the Blue Economy, and at the same time, a well-established Blue Economy can help in addressing some of the root causes of maritime crime in the region.

Goal 17 focuses on partnerships. And that is why we are here today. We are equitable partners on a path to secure our ever-more fractured world.

The United Nations aligns its efforts with many like-minded organizations and forums including the Indian Ocean Commission, Indian Ocean Rim Association,

Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, Combined Maritime Forces, and the European Union Naval Forces.

Partners. Not competitors.

And our world has never needed partnerships more than it does now.

The fulfillment of the main objective of the third Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security and Safety in the Western and Indian Ocean, which is to promote further cooperation towards a more secure and safer maritime space in the Western Indian Ocean is in line with the actions outlined in the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace, notably accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to address the underlying drivers of violence and insecurity and addressing the interlinkages between climate, peace and security

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks for the opportunity to address this high-level meeting and reiterate our commitment to supporting all of you, our Member States, to ensure a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable future for the Indian Ocean region and our world.

Thank you for your kind attention.