

**Signing ceremony of the
Memorandum of Understanding between COMESA and IOC**

Speech of Prof. Vêlayoudom MARIMOUTOU, Secretary General of the IOC

Ebene, April 15, 2024

Honorable, Maneesh Gobin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration, and International Trade of the Republic of Mauritius, and Chairperson of the Council of Ministers of the IOC,

Her Excellency, Mrs. Chileshe Kapwepwe, Secretary-General of COMESA,

Mr Admassu Tadesse, Chairperson of the COMESA Trade and Development Bank,

Mr Dev Haman, Deputy Secretary-General of COMESA,

Mr Marday Venkatasamy, Chairperson of the COMESA Business Council, Board of Directors,

Excellencies,

Honorable guests, in your respective capacities and ranks, all protocols observed,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning

At the very outset, allow me, on behalf of the IOC Secretariat, on behalf of the Chair of the IOC and on my own behalf to extend a warm welcome to you all.

I am deeply honored to stand before you today on this momentous occasion as we gather to celebrate and witness the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between COMESA and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC).

This event marks a significant milestone in our collective journey towards regional cooperation and development. It symbolizes the beginning of a new chapter in our partnership, one that holds immense promises for our regions and peoples.

COMESA, with its 21 member states, stands as a significant economic force on the African continent, embodying a vast and dynamic market with a population exceeding 583 million people and a GDP of 805 billion US Dollars. With such a vast market and a substantial GDP, COMESA holds immense potential for growth and prosperity.

The IOC as an intergovernmental organization is committed to fostering sustainable development and shared prosperity among its member states.

By uniting our efforts, we aim to strengthen our bonds and deepen regional integration.

Together, we are unwavering in our commitment to enhance regional governance and stability, promote regional trade, champion inclusive and sustainable economies, and safeguard our precious natural resources, as outlined in the United Nations' Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), commonly known as Agenda 2030.

Both COMESA and the IOC have been inspired by the UN's vision for a better world and we are pledging to align our strategies with the goals of sustainable development in our respective regions.

According to the SDG report for the year 2023, the impacts of the climate crisis, the conflict in Ukraine, a sluggish global economy, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed vulnerabilities and impeded progress towards the Goals.

The report further cautions that while the lack of progress in achieving the SDGs is widespread, it is undeniable that the world's poorest and most vulnerable nations are bearing the brunt of these unprecedented global challenges.

The effects of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are also palpable in the IOC region. Mindful of the risks confronting the region, the IOC, in collaboration with its member states, has, for the first time in its forty-year history, jointly and collectively crafted a new Strategic Plan spanning a decade.

This plan, often referred to as "Horizon 2030," underscores our shared commitment to addressing the challenges and opportunities outlined in the SDGs.

In line with the Moroni Declaration of 2019 and the revised Victoria Agreement, this IOC strategic plan seeks to address the strategic ambition of the Member States regarding the building of an Indian Ocean Region of resilience, peace and security;

Secondly, a region for sustainable and inclusive growth;

Thirdly, a region which will promote human development with a view to catering, in the long run, for a sustainable work force and a reservoir of competence.

Fourthly, the IOC strategic development plan is also aiming at the strengthening of its institutional and partnership architecture to be able to meet the challenges beyond 2033.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The signing of this Memorandum of Understanding today heralds a new pathway towards heightened cooperation in the domains I just mentioned, and which have been approved by our member states.

While COMESA, as a regional block, is also spearheading the African Union's Agenda for the deepening of regional integration the IOC as an intergovernmental organization for cooperation is poised for the promotion of regional integration. At the same time, it is also defending the cause of the small islands states of the region and those of the African continent, including of course the land locked states, *vis a vis* our development partners.

We pledge to collaborate in intensifying endeavors in maritime security, harnessing the potential of the blue economy, mitigating the impacts of climate change, promoting public health, nurturing youth capacities, and nurturing cultural and creative industries.

We are pledging to collaborate with a view to ensuring security in different areas and across various aspects or dimensions of regional cooperation.

These areas of cooperation represent unprecedented opportunities and challenges for our respective regions. By joining forces and collaborating closely, we can make significant progress in promoting sustainable development, regional security, and the well-being of our populations.

As we embark on this journey, let us remember the importance of unity, collaboration, and shared purpose. Together, we can overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and build a brighter future for generations to come.

I would like to seize this opportunity to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed to the development and realization of this Memorandum of Understanding, as well as to our partners for their unwavering support. Let us work together to make this collaboration a resounding success, to transform our shared vision into reality and to open new horizons for our peoples.

In conclusion, on behalf of the IOC, allow me to reiterate our organization's commitment to make this cooperation a driving force - the locomotive - for progress and prosperity in our respective regions.

Long live COMESA!

Long live the IOC!

Long live regional cooperation!

Thank you.