

Welcome Remarks by

Shri Sudhir T. Devare
Director General
Indian Council of World Affairs

on

**“Reinvigorating Indian Ocean Rim – Association for Regional
Cooperation (IOR-ARC)”**

at

Indian Council of World Affairs,
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Shri Manbir Singh, Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs,

Executive Director of Indian Ocean Rim- Association for Regional Cooperation, H.E.
Dr. Morteza Sarmadi

H.E. Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, Adviser to the Hon'ble President of Maldives,

Dr. Dennis Rumley, Chairman, Indian Ocean Research Group,

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants at this conference,

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Indian Council of World Affairs(ICWA) I have great pleasure in welcoming you all this morning to this international conference “Reinvigorating Indian Ocean Rim- Association for Regional Cooperation(IOR-ARC)”.

We are particularly thankful to the Executive Director of IOR-ARC Secretariat located in Mauritius as well as the Adviser to the Hon'ble President of Maldives for their presence here today. We are also grateful to the Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs for agreeing to give an inaugural address. It is very heartening to find that eminent scholars and experts in the field of Indian Ocean region have travelled to New Delhi from several countries on the littoral of the Indian Ocean. This is the testimony to the growing importance of this region as also the keen interest with which developments in this part of the world are being followed.

The IOR-ARC is now 14 years old ever since it was inaugurated in Mauritius in 1997. It is a unique exercise in regionalism bringing together as it does countries from three continents namely; Asia, Africa and Australia. That this Association has both developing countries, developed countries as well as emerging economies adds to its distinctiveness. This Association was also conceived with the

idea that any attempt towards regional or sub-regional cooperation can progress well only if it is based on a holistic approach combining State to State as well as academic and business level interaction.

Right from the beginning, the agenda of IOR-ARC primarily centred on areas such as trade and investments, science and technology, education and training, piracy, natural disasters, communicable diseases, etc. The membership of this Association saw rapid increase from a core group of seven to the present figure of eighteen with five Dialogue Partners. The apex body of the IOR-ARC has the Council of Foreign Ministers(com). The Association had a charter drawn up from the very beginning which has now happily been revised at the last ministerial meeting in Yemen with a view to revitalising the Association.

A tri-continental Association of this kind may not have been able to make marked progress especially with regard to a preferential trading arrangement or a free trade agreement. With such arrangements in place or being negotiated in each of the three continents and or their sub-regions an IOR-ARC wide FTA may have been difficult to come about. The lack of progress in effective cooperation in the Association could perhaps be due to the complex geo-political and economic circumstances that prevailed in the IOR region in the recent years. However, the growing significance of the Indian Ocean itself today calls for cooperative approach among the littoral countries. Indeed with expanding globalisation and the growing needs for energy security, the Indian Ocean is fast becoming the key region for global security. Today major political conflicts are taking place around this region where concerns for security against threats of terrorism are being witnessed. On the other hand on the economic side, several countries in the Indian Ocean region are today growing at impressive rates creating major opportunities for trade and investment. More than 60% of the world energy resources are transported across the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean and the choke points of the Malacca straits and the Strait of Hormuz are strategically vital areas.

It is against this backdrop that the importance for closer regional cooperation amongst the Indian Ocean countries cannot be over-emphasised. The need, therefore, is to reinvigorate the IOR-ARC. The regionalism which has been envisaged under IOR-ARC is mutually complementary and supportive and is also non-competitive. The decisions that were taken at the last ministerial meeting of IOR-ARC would go a long way in putting this organisation on a sound footing with a clear agenda and programme of action. There are several areas which have been identified and highlighted and now the task before the grouping is to how to harmonise them and implement them. India which will be soon assuming the chair of the IOR-ARC will have a special responsibility and role in this direction.

In this academic group can seek to make a useful contribution. The conference today aims at exploring the relative success of Indian Ocean regionalism and to consider mechanism and procedures by which it can be revitalised.

Perspectives from the various sub-region of the Indian Ocean would be very useful in discussing and analysing the regionalism in the Indian Ocean region. We are therefore delighted and thankful that the representatives across the cross-section of the Indian Ocean region are gathered here today.

Thank you.