

THE INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION (IORA)

1. THE FORMATION OF IORA

Highlighting the importance of economic cooperation between the countries bordering the Indian Ocean, the vision for IORA originated during a visit by late President Nelson Mandela of the Republic of South Africa to India in 1995, where he said:

"The natural urge of the facts of history and geography ... should broaden itself to include the concept of an Indian Ocean Rim for socio-economic co-operation and other peaceful endeavours. Recent changes in the international system demand that the countries of the Indian Ocean shall become a single platform."

This sentiment and rationale underpinned the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative in March 1995, and the creation in March 1997 of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation, as the IORA was then called.

Today, IORA is the apex regional organisation of 21 Member States and 7 Dialogue Partners, stretching from South Africa in the west, running up the eastern coast of Africa, along the Gulf to South and Southeast Asia, ending with Australia in the east. IORA stands committed to work for a peaceful and prosperous Indian Ocean rim.

2. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

On 29-31 March 1995, the Government of Mauritius convened a meeting to discuss the strengthening and expansion of economic cooperation among countries of the Indian Ocean Rim. Representatives from the governments, business sector and academia, from Australia, India, Kenya, Mauritius, the Sultanate of Oman, Singapore and South Africa, subsequently referred to as the "core group states" or M-7, attended the meeting. In a joint statement issued at the end of the meeting, the participants declared that they had agreed on:

"Principles of open regionalism and inclusivity of membership, with the objectives of trade liberalization and promoting trade co-operation. Activities would focus on trade facilitation, promotion and liberalization of trade, investment promotion and economic cooperation."

A tripartite Working Group comprising government, academic and private sector representatives met in Mauritius on 15 –17 August 1995 and decided to create a second track process complementary to an inter-governmental movement. The next meeting in September 1996 finalised a Charter for the creation of IORA, and expanded the membership to include Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Tanzania, Madagascar and Mozambique, also known as the M-14.

IORA was formally launched at the first Ministerial Meeting in Mauritius on 6 – 7 March 1997. This meeting adopted the IORA Charter and determined several administrative and procedural matters.

3. IORA CHARTER

The IORA Charter was adopted during the launch at the first Council of Ministers Meeting in Mauritius on 6-7 March 1997.

Main objective:

To promote the sustained growth and balanced development of the region and of the Member States, and to create common ground for regional economic co-operation.

To date 20 Member States have signed the IORA Charter.

4. PRINCIPLES OF THE IORA

4.1 OPEN REGIONALISM

The Charter declares that IORA seeks to build and expand understanding and mutually beneficial cooperation through a consensus based, evolutionary and non-intrusive approach. There are no laws and binding contracts. All decisions are based on consensus.

5. BASIS OF COOPERATION

Cooperation is based on principles of sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, political independence, and non-interference in internal affairs of Member States, peaceful coexistence and mutual benefit.

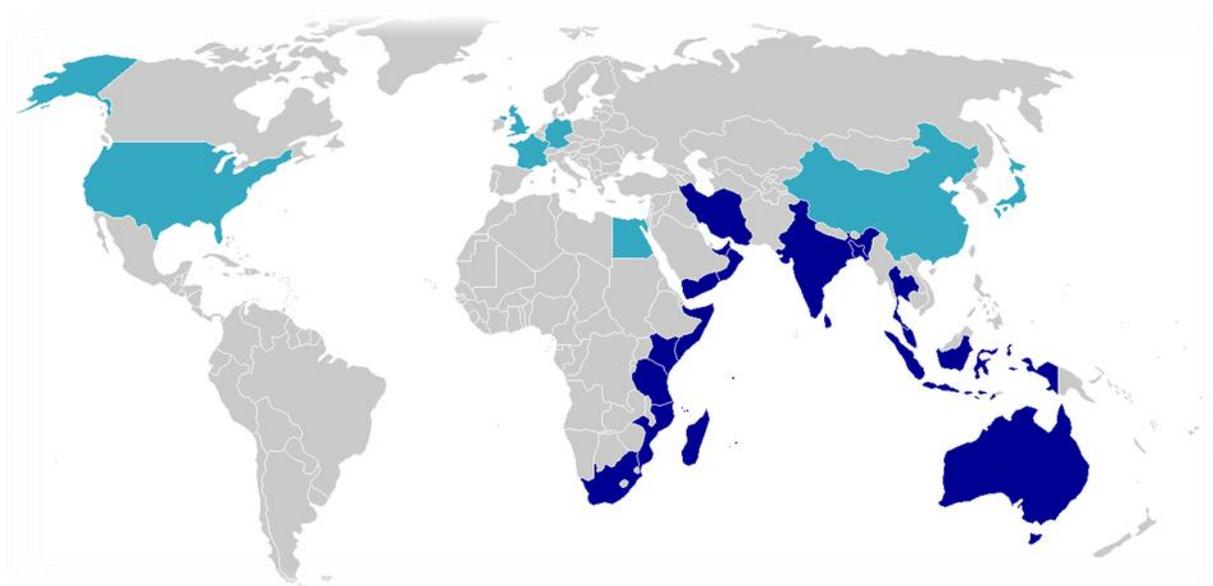
The IORA explicitly excludes bilateral relations and other issues likely to generate controversy that become obstacles or impediments to regional cooperation. Cooperation within the Association does not prejudice the rights and obligations of the Member States within the framework of other economic and trade cooperation arrangements and will not apply automatically to Member States of IORA. It does not seek to be a substitute, but tries to reinforce, be complementary to and consistent with, the bilateral, pluri-lateral and multilateral rights and obligations of Member States.

The objectives of the Association are:

- To promote sustainable growth and balanced development of the region and Member States;
- To focus on those areas of economic cooperation which provide maximum opportunities for development, shared interest and mutual benefits; and,
- To promote liberalisation, remove impediments and lower barriers towards a freer and enhanced flow of goods, services, investment, and technology within the Indian Ocean rim.

6. MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to all sovereign states of the Indian Ocean Rim willing to subscribe to the principles and objectives of the Charter. The IORA is firmly based on the principle of open regionalism.



- 21 Member States
- 7 Dialogue Partners

The current 21 Member States are: Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. IORA also has seven Dialogue Partners: China, Egypt, France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and one Observer, the Indian Ocean Research Group (IORG).

The Association has two Specialised Agencies: The Regional Centre for Science and Technology Transfer (RCSTT) based in Tehran, Iran; and the Fisheries Support Unit (FSU) based in Muscat, Oman.

In addition, IORA has the Chair in Indian Ocean Studies (CIOS) co-sponsored by India and Mauritius and its role is to foster research activities and studies in fields of interest to IORA, with a view to evolving realistic programmes of cooperation.

7. CHAIRS OF IORA

The Council of Ministers elects the Chair of the Association for a period of two years. This is based on the voluntary offer by Member States to become the Chair or; if there is no voluntary offer, the Chair will be elected based on geographical consideration.

Chair	Year
Republic of Mauritius	1997 – 1998
Republic of Mozambique	1999 - 2000
Sultanate of Oman	2001 - 2002
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka	2003 – 2005

Islamic Republic of Iran	2006 – 2008
Republic of Yemen	2009 – 2010
Republic of India	2011 – 2012
Commonwealth of Australia	2013 – 2014
Republic of Indonesia	2015 – 2017
Republic of South Africa	2017 – 2019
United Arab Emirates	2019 – 2021

8. STRUCTURE

IORA's apex body is the Council of Foreign Ministers (COM) that meets annually. The COM meetings are preceded by the meetings of the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), the Indian Ocean Rim Academic Group (IORAG), the Indian Ocean Rim Business Forum (IORBF), and the Working Group on Trade and Investment (WGTI).

The Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) meets Bi-annually to review the work plan, which is based on the outcomes of the COM and its related meetings, and to consider activities for the year ahead.

9. SECRETARIAT

The IORA Secretariat is located in Mauritius and is headed by Secretary-General Ambassador Dr Nomvuyo N. Nokwe. She is supported by four Directors seconded by Member States:

- a) Mr Graham Anderson, South Africa
- b) Ms Ruchika Rishi, India
- c) Dr Gatot Gunawan, Indonesia
- d) Mr Marc Livsey, Australia

In addition, the IORA Secretariat has ten (10) local staff that support the Secretary-General and the seconded Directors.

10. BUDGET

The annual budget of the Secretariat is based on the annual membership contributions by the Member States to carry out its activities.

11. SPECIAL FUND

The High-level Task Force (HLTF), established by the Council of Ministers in its third meeting held in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, April 2001, to monitor the direction for the Association was mandated among others to examine the idea for the creation of a "special fund" for implementing the Association's projects and programmes. The HLTF met twice in Sri Lanka (October 2001) and Iran (January 2002) respectively to discuss the proposal. At the meeting held in Iran, the HLTF recommended that a Special Fund be established as a financial mechanism for supporting and complementing the funding of projects and programmes adopted by the Association, in line with the principles and objectives enshrined in the Charter as well as the objectives and goals envisaged by the relevant organs of the Organisation.

The Special Fund was established by the Council of Ministers in its meeting held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, August 2004 and a contingency Fund in full was transferred as the initial reserve for this Fund. The Memorandum on the establishment of the IORA Special Fund was approved by the Council of Minister (COM) in its meeting held in Tehran, February 2006. The rules and procedures were established in 2008.

Mission

The mission of a Special Fund would be to contribute to the Association's objectives through the provision of funds and to assist interested members in their fund-raising for the feasibility study as well as the implementation of approved projects and programmes. The Special Fund could also play a role in capacity building at the national level to support implementing projects.

Objectives

The principal objectives of the Special Fund are as follows:

- to assist with the provision of funds needed for the implementation of projects and programmes;
- to assist with the preparation of projects;
- to assist with the provision of technical assistance for preparation and/or implementation of projects;
- to assist with pre-feasibility and feasibility project studies.

12. CONSOLIDATION OF IORA

Since India became the IORA Chair for the period 2011-2013, there has been a growing direction and determination to strengthen institutions and capacities within IORA. India revitalised IORA during its chairmanship and six Priority Areas were identified (as indicated below) on the basis to focus cooperation amongst Member States. The six Priority Sectors resulted in clearly defining the way forward for the organisation and focusing the efforts along these priority areas.

Australia, during its chairmanship, (2013 – 2015), sustained the momentum through sharpening IORA's strategic focus with the adoption of two cross-cutting issues; the Blue Economy and Women's Economic Empowerment. Recommendations were made for ensuring that IORA is better placed to work on these priority areas. The recommendations included the reorganisation of the agenda items based on the six Priority Areas, format of reports, among others. The Association changed its name from the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), signifying this renewed vigour in the work of the Association.,

Indonesia's chairmanship (2015 – 2017), introduced the theme; "Strengthening Maritime Cooperation in a Peaceful and Stable Indian Ocean" as part of efforts to boost economic cooperation between the IORA Member States. Its chairmanship coincided with the Association's 20th anniversary and to mark this occasion, the first IORA Leaders' Summit was held in Jakarta on 7 March 2017. The Summit's adoption and signing of the "The Jakarta Concord" elevated the Association's profile and stature to a significantly higher level and charted the way forward for the Association into the next decade, beginning with South Africa's Chairmanship.

To this end, the Jakarta Concord provides the highest levels of commitment to ensuring that the Indian Ocean is a region of peace, stability and development through enhanced cooperation, including, but not limited to, the six priority areas. The Jakarta Concord was accompanied by the IORA Action Plan which

provides a firm set of realistic and measurable commitments for the IORA Council of Ministers to implement the Jakarta Concord and take IORA forward in a more outcome orientated manner.

The IORA Action Plan provides for short, medium and long terms goals to:

- Promote Maritime Safety and Security in the Region;
- Enhance trade and investment cooperation in the Region;
- Promote sustainable and responsible fisheries management and development;
- Strengthen academic, science and technology cooperation;
- Foster tourism and cultural exchanges;
- Harness and develop the Blue Economy in the Region;
- Promote gender equality and the economic empowerment of women and girls; and
- Strengthen the IORA Secretariat and its collaboration with stakeholders.

The IORA Business Summit hosted by Indonesia in March 2017 also served to highlight the tremendous (economic) potential of IORA.

South Africa's view is that the Indian Ocean Region should be characterised as a region of peace, stability and development within which to pursue the goal of promoting (economic) cooperation for the wellbeing and development of the countries and peoples of the Indian Ocean Rim. To this end, South Africa has adopted the following theme as Chair from 2017 – 2019:

“IORA – uniting the peoples of Africa, Asia, Australasia, and the Middle East through enhanced cooperation for peace, stability and sustainable development”.

The United Arab Emirates will assume the Chair of IORA from 2019-2021.

The potential for a renewed and revitalised architecture of regional economic cooperation for development, resulting in a paradigm shift engagement between Indian Ocean states, is now a reality.

13. PRIORITY AREAS

In 2011 the priorities of the Association were overhauled in consonance with the emerging geo-strategic challenges that then confronted the Indian Ocean region and were re-formulated as:

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| • Maritime Safety and Security; | • Trade and Investment Facilitation; |
| • Fisheries Management; | • Disaster Risk Management; |
| • Academic, Science and Technology Cooperation; and | • Tourism and Cultural Exchanges. |

Two cross-cutting focus areas of cooperation were added in 2014:

- The Blue Economy; and
- Women's Economic Empowerment.

14. SPECIAL PROGRAMMES

14.1 Sectoral Ministerial events

IORA is interacting with other line Ministries of Member States because of sectoral initiatives coordinated by these Ministries. The following events were held to date:

- Second Ministerial Blue Economy Conference (BEC-II), 8-10 May 2017, Indonesia
- Second Economic and Business Conference (EBC-II), 11-13 April 2016, Dubai
- First IORA Ministerial Blue Economy Conference (BEC-I), 2-3 September 2015, Mauritius
- First IORA Tourism Ministerial Meeting, 20-21 November 2014, Seychelles
- First Meeting of the Renewable Energy Ministerial Forum of IORA, 21 January 2014, UAE
- First Ministerial Economic and Business Conference (EBC-I), 4-5 July 2013, Mauritius

14.2 Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD)

The Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD) initiative emerged from the 13th Meeting of the Council of Ministers in Perth, Australia held in November 2013, where India's External Affairs Minister announced New Delhi's plans to host the first Dialogue.

The IORA regards the IOD as an important event which as a Track 1.5 Dialogue brings together key stakeholders from governments and think tanks from all Member States and Dialogue Partners of IORA. To date, five Indian Ocean Dialogues were held: (1) Kochi, India, in September 2014 (2) Perth, in September 2015, (3) Padang, Indonesia in April 2016, (4) Abu Dhabi, UAE in October 2017 and (5) Durban, South Africa, in August 2018. Discussions included a wide range of topics such as economic cooperation, maritime safety and security, blue economy, human assistance and disaster relief, etc. and resulted in the Kochi, Perth, Padang and Abu Dhabi Consensuses respectively and the Durban Outcomes Report.

14.3 IORA Sustainable Development Programme (ISDP)

IORA introduced the IORA Sustainable Development Programme (ISDP) at the CSO meeting held in Perth in 2014 as an instrument of development to strengthen the capacities of the less developed IORA countries and foster regional cooperation and forge new partnership with IORA Member States especially with a focus on employment generation and poverty alleviation.

The ISDP allows for access to the IORA Special Fund through a special arrangement for the less developed Member States with much of the organisation and logistics of the event being managed by the Secretariat in consultation with the hosting Member State.

The ISDP was launched in 2015 with the first event held in April in Bangladesh followed by Tanzania in the same month.

14.4 Somalia and Yemen Development Programme (SYDP)

The Secretariat also launched a new initiative for capacity building for Somalia and Yemen at the 18th meeting of the CSO that was held in Bali on 25-26 October 2016. The first SYDP, focusing on Banking and Artisanal Fisheries, was hosted by the United Arab Emirates, on 13-14 August 2017, in Abu Dhabi. Follow-up meetings under this programme are being considered by the Association.

15. MINISTERIAL DECLARATIONS

- a) Declaration on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, Jakarta, Indonesia, 7 March 2017
- b) Declaration on Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment, Bali, Indonesia, 27 October 2016
- c) IORA Maritime Cooperation Declaration, Padang, Indonesia, 23 October 2015
- d) Mauritius Declaration on the Blue Economy, Mauritius, 3 September 2015
- e) Seychelles Tourism Declaration, Seychelles, 21 November 2014
- f) IORA Economic Declaration, Perth, Australia, 9 October 2014
- g) Abu Dhabi Declaration of the First Indian Ocean Renewable Energy Ministerial Forum, Abu Dhabi, 21 January 2014
- h) First IORA Declaration - Declaration of the Indian Ocean Rim Association on the Principles for Peaceful, Productive and Sustainable Use of the Indian Ocean and its Resources, Perth, Australia, 1 November 2013

16. OBSERVERSHIP

16.1 IORA becomes a UN Observer

IORA has been granted Observer status at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) through Resolution A/RES/70/123 in December 2015. Two events were hosted by Indonesia and Seychelles in 2017 in the margins of flagship events at UNGA: (a) IORA side event on maritime cooperation of IORA along 3rd Prep Com Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) and Side event (Partnerships for Blue Economy – The Indian Ocean experience) to be hosted by Seychelles - UN Conference on Oceans; SDG 14 Implementation.

16.2 Accreditation to the African Union (AU)

On 9 November 2015, the IORA Secretary General, Mr K. V. Bhagirath, presented his Letter of Credentials to the African Union Commission Chairperson, H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, formalising IORA's observer status with the AU. A proposal for a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between IORA and the AU was proposed, and it is in the process of being finalised for signature.

16.3 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

At its 61st session held on 26 September 2014, the Trade and Development Board approved the application by IORA for observer status with UNCTAD under rule 76 of the rules of procedure of the Board. IORA would be able to be represented and to participate in the Trade and Development Board meetings, as well as in the public intergovernmental meetings organised by UNCTAD. IORA Secretariat has also been included in the mailing list of UNCTAD.

17. MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) signed

To enhance the relationship between IORA and its Partners, Memorandum of Understanding have been concluded by the Association and institutions in areas of mutual interest under the six Priority and cross-cutting areas. MOUs in IORA are not legally binding.

The MOUs that have been signed to date included the following:

No.	MOU	Date/Venue
1.	Establishment of the Regional Centre for Science and Technology (RCSTT) in Iran	23 June 2008 at the IORA Secretariat, Mauritius
2.	Establishment of the Fisheries Support Unit (FSU) in Oman	15 November 2011 at the 11 th COM, Bengaluru, India
3.	The Coordination and Cooperation of Search and Rescue Services in the Indian Ocean Region	To date, eleven Member States have signed the MOU on Search and Rescue namely; Australia, Bangladesh, Union of Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Thailand
4.	Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)	To date, nine Member States, namely India, Bangladesh, Mauritius, Singapore, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Yemen have signed
5.	Non-Aligned Movement for South-South Technical Cooperation (NAM CSSTC)	28 November 2017, Jakarta, Indonesia
6.	Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS)	16 January 2018, New Delhi, India

18. IORA Website

It can be accessed at www.iora.int