THE INDIAN OCEAN

Home to nearly 2.7 billion people, IORA Member States are rich in cultural diversity, languages and religions, and have been linked by commerce for centuries. As the third largest ocean, the Indian Ocean is important to international trade and transport, carrying half of the world’s container ships, one-third of the world’s bulk cargo traffic and two-thirds of the world’s oil shipments.

Established in 1997, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is a dynamic inter-governmental organisation aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian Ocean region through its 22 Member States and 10 Dialogue Partners.

The concept of IORA originated with late President Nelson Mandela of South Africa during a visit to India in 1995, where he envisaged: “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.”

MEMBER STATES AND DIALOGUE PARTNERS

Membership is open to all sovereign states of the Indian Ocean Rim willing to subscribe to the principles and objectives of the Charter. **Member States** are: Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

**Dialogue Partners**: China, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and two Observers, the Indian Ocean Research Group (IORG) and the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA).

STRUCTURE

IORA’s apex body is the Council of Ministers (COM) which gathers Foreign Ministers annually. The Council of Ministers elects a Chair of the Association for a period of two years on a voluntary basis. The United Arab Emirates is the current Chair (2019-21) and will be followed by the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (2021-23).

A Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) meets twice a year to progress IORA’s agenda and consider recommendations by Working Groups and forums of officials, business and academics to implement policies and projects to improve the lives of people in Member States. A number of Ministerial
Conferences are convened on thematic issues such as the Blue Economy, Women’s Economic Empowerment and Tourism. Each year around 30 capacity building activities are hosted by Member States around the region.

**PRIORITY AND FOCUS AREAS**

The IORA Charter states the aim of IORA to build and expand understanding, peaceful co-existence and mutually beneficial cooperation through a consensus based and non-intrusive approach. There are six priority and two cross-cutting focus areas (Blue Economy and Women’s Economic Empowerment).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maritime Safety &amp; Security</th>
<th>Trade &amp; Investment Facilitation</th>
<th>Fisheries Management</th>
<th>Disaster Risk Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourism &amp; Cultural Exchange</td>
<td>Academic, Science &amp; Technology</td>
<td>Blue Economy</td>
<td>Women’s Economic Empowerment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CELEBRATING TWENTY YEARS**

The Inaugural IORA Leaders’ Summit was held on 7 March 2017 in Jakarta, Indonesia. The theme was “Strengthening Maritime Cooperation for a Peaceful, Stable and Prosperous Indian Ocean” which brought together Prime Ministers and Presidents to celebrate IORA’s 20th anniversary. The Summit provided momentum to strengthen regional cooperation through the milestone IORA Concord and IORA Action Plan for 2017 – 2021.

**SPECIALISED AGENCIES**

IORA has a number of Memorandum of Understandings with partners as well as two Specialised Agencies:

- The Fisheries Support Unit (FSU) was established in the Sultanate of Oman in 2003 to enhance cooperation, better utilisation of fisheries resources and joint research activities.
- The Regional Centre for Science and Technology Transfer (RCSTT) was created in 2008 in the Islamic Republic of Iran to facilitate the transfer of sustainable and appropriate technology.

**IORA SPECIAL FUND**

Since 2008, the IORA Special Fund has operated as a financial mechanism to support projects and programmes adopted by the Association within the identified priority and focus areas.

**IORA SECRETARIAT**

The Secretariat manages, coordinates, services and monitors the implementation of IORA policy decisions and work programmes. It is based in Mauritius and overseen by a Secretary General, who is appointed for a three-year period, supported by seconded officials from Member States and local staff. The Secretary-General is H.E. Ambassador Dr Nomvuyo N. Nokwe from South Africa.