

Statement

by



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at

**Trilateral Dialogue
on
Indian Ocean (TDIO)**

at

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On behalf of ICWA, India's oldest and premier foreign policy think tank, I rise to extend a warm welcome to all of you to this Conference, the Trilateral Dialogue on Indian Ocean (TDIO.) It is one of the more important and innovative initiatives taken by us. It is a testimony to our deep interest in developments relating to Asia and the Indian Ocean.

2. It is essentially a Track-II exercise to which a few officials have been invited. It has been possible to convene this gathering of eminent experts with the whole hearted cooperation of Australia and Indonesia, besides India. We are confident that this project will be continued in the next few years so that it succeeds in achieving our shared goals as a Track II mechanism, devoted to the well-being of our region.

3. The Indian Ocean enjoys an exceptional importance for all its littoral countries and others for reasons of history, geography, economics, geo-politics and the unfolding shifts of power towards Asia. Before this esteemed assembly, I need not refer to detailed facts and figures to elaborate this observation, except to recall what our Governments had stated in November 2011: "The Indian Ocean is a part of our collective destiny, and there is clearly a case for developing a holistic vision and work cooperatively towards its realization if we are to cope with the challenges of the 21st century." I should highlight that the region, given recent developments of strategic character, commands special attention of our three countries. Our endeavour should be to explore and deepen the contours of our common perceptions and assessments as well as to explore the possibilities of ensuring coordinated action reflecting purposeful synergy.

4. Some of us may be tempted to look for a new name for our region. New names representing innovative concepts are coming into use now, supplanting "Asia-Pacific" by "Indo-Pacific", "India-Pacific", "Trans-Asia" and "Indo-Asia-Pacific". Opinions and preferences in India vary, as indeed elsewhere. We would suggest that a debate on names is unnecessary at this forum as we all are committed to focusing on a critical study of opportunities and challenges facing us in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) stretching from the Horn of Africa to Australia.

5. We may have different priorities, but it should be possible to agree on identifying common and contemporary challenges and opportunities in our region.

6. Our countries seek inclusive, sustainable development for our peoples as well as for all other countries of the region, because economic growth and continued development alone could make it a region of progress and prosperity. Expanding trade, investment, technology and services flows is essential for this goal. Thus, we are seeing new initiatives such as Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) attracting much attention of governments today. The issue of exploiting the Indian Ocean's resources in an equitable manner is also assuming considerable salience. Besides, we should also focus on other developmental priorities including food and energy security, connectivity and infrastructural linkages, and other facets of 'cooperative regionalism.'

7. However, the prospects of development face numerous threats and challenges in the security and other domains, both of traditional and non-traditional nature. Piracy and terrorism as well as natural disasters, humanitarian and disaster assistance and climate change are often mentioned in this context. We could factor in the impact of maritime rivalries among the Great Powers, freedom of navigation, safety and security of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) as well as other relevant challenges. The region clearly needs inclusive and cooperative arrangements for its maritime security. It is also suggested that the Indian Ocean has a composite culture and an inter-connected identity of its own. We need to define its components and engage with public opinion to expand awareness of the key stakes involved.

8. Following an objective evaluation of critical geo-political, security and economic developments of the past decade, we need to develop a blueprint for supporting forces and factors that favour stability, security, peace, economic development and prosperity. In particular, we should reflect as on what actionable elements could be included in our proposed joint statement that may emerge from our deliberations.

9. In this broad context, we plan to work together to evaluate, strengthen and empower IOR-ARC in all facets of its functioning. The Association has benefitted considerably from the new initiatives taken during the pro-active tenure of India as the Chair, but we need to continue and broaden this trend in future. Being the present Chair (India) and future Chairs (Australia and Indonesia), we are in a position to adopt a creative and forward-looking approach. It is worth

recalling that at its 12th meeting in November 2012, the Council of Ministers of IOR-ARC stated: “We emphasise the important role that IOR-ARC Troika can play in coordinating cooperation through interaction among its members”. Our TDIO institutions could serve as the intellectual reservoir for the official Troika. There is a pressing need for us to come up with new ideas for consideration of policy-makers as well as opinion-makers so that our 20-member Association becomes optimally effective in securing its objectives.

10. Over the years, the Ministers and Senior Officials have contributed to the steady development of the Association. Its three components, namely, the Working Group on Trade and Investment, Academic Forum and Business Forum, have made numerous recommendations, as has the Secretary General. The strategic communities of Member-States have also made other suggestions in this backdrop. It may be useful to recall them here, for the purpose of triggering a focused debate. Here is a brief, not exhaustive, inventory of suggestions on how to strengthen and empower IOR-ARC:

- i) Extend cooperation beyond ‘six priority areas’ {They are: maritime security and piracy, disaster risk reduction, trade and investment facilitation, fisheries management, academic and S&T cooperation, and tourism and cultural exchanges.} Perhaps inclusion of blue ocean/maritime economy and establishing a linkage between the Association’s institutions and the Member-States’ defence institutions such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) could be considered.
- ii) Define scope and nature of inextricable link between economic regionalism and security multilateralism.
- iii) ‘Development pillar’ may be strengthened by considering feasibility of sub-regional agreements for preferential or free trade arrangements.

- iv) ‘Maritime Security pillar’ may be strengthened by drawing suitable lessons regarding regional security architecture presently under the umbrella of East Asia Summit (EAS).
- v) Institutional reforms may include increase in the Association’s budget, expanding the role of Secretary General, developing a Code of Guidelines for the role by Dialogue Partners, and creating viable Track II linkages among the Member-States.
- vi) Consider convening the first Summit Meeting of HOS/HOG of IOR-ARC.

11. An idea worth considering is whether our initiative – TDIO – needs to include other countries. Besides, we should urge Indonesia to identify one of their leading think tanks as the partner that works closely with the Indian Council of World Affairs and Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) for nurturing this initiative in future. We will no doubt wish to work out a schedule of our next meetings.

12. In conclusion, we are confident that our debate and deliberations will be conducted in a candid and cordial environment. After all, we are committed to the Association’s goals of “promoting sustained growth, balanced development and stability, cooperation based on mutual trust and respect, common interests and similar approaches towards the present issues of our region.”

Thank you very much for your attention.
