

## **IORA's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific**

### **Introduction**

1. The interconnectedness of the Indian and Pacific Oceans is fundamental to understanding the Indo-Pacific region. This large maritime area spreads across the Pacific Rim, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, and the Eastern and Southern Africa, and is home to about 64% of global population.

2. In recent history, the Indo-Pacific region has seen strong and sustained economic growth and contributes over 60% of the global GDP. About half of the global trade takes place through the maritime routes in this region. This has led to increased connectivity, regional and inter-regional cooperation, and greater economic opportunities. The Indian Ocean Rim is an essential part of the Indo-Pacific region of which IORA is a prominent regional organization with 2.5 billion people residing in its Member States. IORA has thus a strong interest in ensuring peace, prosperity, economic cooperation, maritime safety and security, and stability for all the peoples of the Indo-Pacific region.

3. The Indo-Pacific region has attracted global attention and is driven by common opportunities and challenges. States and regional organizations have referred to the Indo-Pacific region in their statements. Some IORA Member States have issued position papers or public documents highlighting their views on the Indo-Pacific region. This includes Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper; France's Indo-Pacific strategy 2018; and India's 'Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative' (IPOI) in 2019. Regional associations/organizations such as ASEAN have also issued similar documents i.e. ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

4. It is also in the interest of IORA to support cooperation efforts among its Member States, Dialogue Partners, regional and international organizations, as well as relevant stakeholders which aim to enhance cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **Principles**

5. Since its inception, IORA has sought to build and expand understanding and mutually beneficial cooperation through a consensus-based, evolutionary and non-intrusive approach. The principles as enunciated in the IORA Charter, would also benefit the Indo-Pacific region. These include:

- (a) Cooperation will be based on respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit;
- (b) Bilateral and other issues likely to generate controversy and be an impediment to regional cooperation efforts will be excluded from deliberations;
- (c) Promotion of principles of good governance by Member States will enable smooth implementation of programs; and
- (d) Respect for the IORA Charter and adherence with International Law, in particular; the UN Charter, the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and other relevant UN treaties and international conventions, as applicable.

## **Objectives**

6. Consistent with the above-mentioned Principles, the following objectives shall guide IORA's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region:
- (a) Enhance Maritime safety and security in the Indo-Pacific region, and the exercise of freedom of navigation & over-flight, in accordance with International Law, including the Charter of the United Nations and the 1982 UNCLOS;
  - (b) Promote Economic growth and shared prosperity for all through open, transparent, inclusive, rules-based and fair systems that enables balanced and sustainable development; enhanced connectivity to promote inclusive growth; building of resilience to better manage future crisis and disruptions and unimpeded and free flow of commerce in the Indo-Pacific region;
  - (c) Promote Conservation, sustainable use, and management of marine resources in the Indo-Pacific region; to work towards addressing the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, marine pollution, and other significant and harmful impacts to the environment in line with international Agreements;

- (d) Establish and/or strengthen frameworks in the region that build trust, promote friendship, facilitate dialogue among relevant stakeholders, as well as enable collaborative action and cooperation to advance peace and security, including building and strengthening resilience and the ability to respond to emergencies;
- (e) Build and/or strengthen mutual trust and respect, enable partnership and promote dialogue among the countries in the Indo-Pacific region with the aim of ensuring peace, prosperity, cooperation, security and stability for all;
- (f) Strengthen existing mechanisms, including the IORA Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security (WGMSS), consistent with the principles of international rules-based institutions, that can deliver security and prosperity for all in a transparent, stable, inclusive and non-intrusive environment;
- (g) Enhance coordination and collaboration among stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region by strengthening the cooperation in maritime safety and security, including the response to emergencies at sea and the conduct of search and rescue in accordance with international law;
- (h) Promote conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development as enunciated in the UN SDGs, particularly SDG-14;
- (i) Strive to realize a fair, non-discriminatory, non-coercive, inclusive, equitable, transparent, sustainable, predictable and stable trade and investment environment that enhances economic growth and cooperation while building resilient regional and global value chains and ensuring debt sustainability;
- (j) Promote greater and more efficient connectivity within the Indo-Pacific region to facilitate movement of goods, services, people to people exchanges and transfer of technology in accordance with international law. Such connectivity initiatives may include physical, institutional, people-to-people and digital linkages that support an open, reliable, secure, stable, and peaceful cyberspace, while ensuring that the existing and future connectivity initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region complement and support one another
- (k) Support efforts by other regional organizations in the Indo-Pacific region to foster regional cooperation and dialogue where possible; and
- (l) Strengthen and collaborate with relevant sub-regional and regional associations and organizations to bolster regional cooperation and enhance complementarity;

## **Areas of Cooperation**

7. IORA will strive to explore opportunities for mutual cooperation with countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Cooperation in the following six priority areas and two cross-cutting issues are of immediate interest: Maritime Safety and Security; Trade and Investment Facilitation; Fisheries Management; Disaster Risk Management; Academic, Science and Technology Cooperation; Tourism and Cultural Exchanges; Blue Economy and Women's Economic Empowerment. These however do not preclude other areas which may be of common interest to all IORA Member States. New areas of cooperation can thus be added subject to consensus by IORA Council of Ministers (COM).

8. IORA acknowledges that its Member States will find opportunities to work with other countries and organizations in the Indo-Pacific region with major stakes and interests in promoting peace, development, openness, and inclusivity in the Indo-Pacific region to achieve IORA's objectives as enshrined in the IORA Charter while strengthening cooperation and collaboration in - frameworks governing the maritime domain which is the vital link that connects this entire region. IORA will seek cooperation with other countries and organizations in a manner that will enhance its outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

## **Mechanisms**

9. IORA's functional bodies are encouraged to examine proposals and initiatives for cooperation, seek necessary approvals and implement as per the IORA Charter and rules with a view to realize synergies and leverage the work of relevant sub-regional and regional associations and organizations. In areas where there are no functional bodies, IORA could consider the creation of new working groups or functional bodies based on consensus in accordance with the existing institutional mechanism set out in the IORA Charter.

10. The IORA Special Fund can be used to finance the implementation of agreed projects, in accordance with the priorities of IORA, and Administrative Arrangements of the IORA Special Fund.

## **Conclusion**

11. Considering the increasing awareness of the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region, IORA would be guided by the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, inclusivity, respect for international law, including the UN Charter, the principle of pacific settlement of disputes, political independence, non-interference in internal

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affairs, non-discrimination, peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit in cooperation among its members and with its partners to build strategic trust through dialogue, transparency, and engagement.

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