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வெளிநாட்டு அமைச்சு
FOREIGN MINISTRY

ජනරජ පොඩිනුවිල්ල, කොළඹ 1, ශ්‍රී ලංකාව, குடியரசு கட்டிடம், கொழும்பு 1, Republic Building, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

Media Release

Leading the IORA Maritime Safety and Security Working Group, Sri Lanka finalizes the second Work Plan for 2022 to 2026

The 2nd Meeting of the IORA Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security (IORA WGMSS) chaired by Sri Lanka, was held virtually from 18 to 19 March 2021 with the virtual participation of delegates representing the IORA Member States and the IORA Secretariat.

The Foreign Secretary Admiral Prof. Jayanath Colombage inaugurated the meeting on 18 March 2021, and highlighted that the time is opportune to translate our discussions on maritime safety and security issues into action. He referred to the maritime crime trinity – narcotics, human and weapon trafficking, which is increasing, despite numerous initiatives by the Global Maritime Crimes Programme of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and several other regional and international entities and national governments. He further emphasized the alarming 40% of fishing that comes from IUU Fishing, in the Indian Ocean, quoting a UN Food and Agriculture Organization Report. Further, the Foreign Secretary noted the Impact of IUU fishing on the marine environment and the sustainable management of fisheries resources. He detailed how fishing boats are involved in the increase in trafficking and pollution in the marine environment, recalling the dead zone of 60,000 square kilometres in the Bay of Bengal, and the large garbage patch in the southern part of the Indian Ocean. *“With humans releasing at least 8 million metric tons of plastic every year to the oceans, soon there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish, resulting in unhealthy scenarios”*.

He further added *“now, again, I have to say that I do see another three trends emerging or already emerged in the Indian Ocean. Number one, the politicisation of the maritime trade; number two, the politicisation of maritime-related infrastructure and number three, increased militarisation of the Indian Ocean”* and emphasized that *“we need international rules-based maritime order and enhance maritime trade connectivity as there is a huge asymmetry in the Indian Ocean Region”*.

The Foreign Secretary expressed his confidence that Sri Lanka is looking forward to continuing its leadership role in the next tenure as the lead country for the IORA – WGMSS, and that Sri Lanka is also looking forward to playing an effective role to benefit the IORA family, during its tenure as Vice-Chair which is expected to begin around the fourth quarter of 2021, for enhanced regional cooperation within the Indian Ocean Region.

Acting Secretary General of IORA Dr. Gunawan H. Gatot joining the Inauguration virtually extended his sincere *appreciation to the Foreign Ministry of Sri Lanka for the exceptional arrangements made to host the second meeting of the IORA WGMSS in a hybrid format, despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic challenges.*

He further reiterated “*Prevention cannot depend on anticipating how threats to maritime safety and security will evolve. During these ongoing challenging times, we must recognize the opportunity to enhance cooperation through stronger partnerships, and, effective coordination and planning. I hope that today, through this hybrid Meeting, we can engage in constructive discussions on the way forward to review and update the current IORA WGMSS Work Plan, and to share best practices that strengthen cooperation within the Maritime Safety and Security Framework of IORA.*”

The Inaugural Ceremony was held in accordance with COVID-19 protocols and was attended by Heads of Missions and or other diplomats of IORA Member States and Dialogue Partner countries based in Colombo, UN Resident Coordinator, Head of Global Maritime Crime Programme of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (GMCP-UNODC) and senior officials from other stakeholder agencies related to maritime safety and security.

The meeting was chaired by Director General of Ocean Affairs, Environment & Climate Change of the Foreign Ministry Hasanthi Urugodawatte Dissanayake.

Prior to the meeting, on 17 March 2021, an informal virtual meeting was held to discuss the Agenda and modalities by the 08 Cluster Group Member States of IORA WGMSS, represented by 20 delegates. Cluster Group comprises of Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and United Arab Emirates.

An introductory session was held to stimulate the participating Member State representatives on Maritime Safety and Security issues. The session included a presentation by Head of GMCP – UNODC Alan Cole on “*The Emerging Threats to Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region*” and on “*Maritime Safety and Security: Challenges and Solutions from Stable Seas Perspective*” by Stable Seas Organization Jay Benson. This introductory session was moderated by Commander of the Eastern Naval Area and Chief Hydrographer of Sri Lanka Navy Rear Admiral Y. N. Jayarathna.

44 delegates joined virtually representing 15 Member States out of 23, and discussed the succeeding Work Plan of IORA WGMSS for the period of 2022 – 2026. Deliberations involved taking into consideration drawbacks in the earlier Work Plan, in terms of format, implementation responsibilities and the COVID 19 pandemic, as well as new activities proposed by the Member States. The Work Plan for 2022 to 2026 was finalized with more specific activities and individual Member States and or the IORA Secretariat taking responsibility for each activity which was considered, as more pragmatic in moving forward. It also included uncompleted activities from the 2019 – 2021 Work Plan.

Foreign Ministry
Colombo

26 March 2021