



**Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)
Ministerial Conference on Women's Economic Empowerment:
A Pre-requisite for Sustainable Development
The Ravenala Attitude Hotel, BalACLava, Mauritius
28-29 August 2018**

**BALACLAVA DECLARATION ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND
GENDER EQUALITY AS A PRE-REQUISITE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Preamble

We, the Ministers responsible for Women Affairs and Gender of the Member States of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Commonwealth of Australia, People's Republic of Bangladesh, Union of Comoros, Republic of India, Republic of Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kenya, Republic of Madagascar, Malaysia, Republic of Mauritius, Republic of Mozambique, Sultanate of Oman, Republic of Seychelles, Federal Republic of Somalia, Republic of South Africa, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, United Republic of Tanzania, and Republic of Yemen on the occasion of the First IORA Women's Economic Empowerment Ministerial Conference:

Restate the shared commitment to the 17 Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially Sustainable Development Goal 5, to change the course of the 21st century by addressing key challenges such as poverty, unemployment, inequality and violence against women and girls. Women's economic empowerment is a foundational element of gender equality and the full and equal realisation of women's human rights and is thus integral to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development. For sustainable development to become a reality, women's empowerment is a pre-requisite. Gender inclusiveness, gender equality, rights of women and girls are essential for strong sustainable and balanced growth.

Recognise earlier efforts by IORA Member States to promote gender equality by establishing women's economic empowerment as a cross-cutting issue at the *13th Council of Ministers Meeting* in Perth, Australia on 1 November 2013. Subsequent Ministerial Declarations have re-affirmed the principle of gender equality and empowerment as central to inclusive sustainable economic growth, such as the *2014 Economic Declaration*; the *2015 Perth Consensus*; the *2016 Declaration on Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment*; and the *2017 Jakarta Concord*. We also acknowledge the numerous initiatives undertaken by the IORA community in driving and furthering women's economic development agenda.

Reaffirm the implementation of flagship initiatives for women's economic empowerment as set out in the IORA Action Plan for 2017-21 and commends the Inaugural Meeting of the Working Group for Women's Economic Empowerment which was held on 28 August 2018 which aims to strengthen, advance, and coordinate gender activities within the Association.

Recognise that women's economic empowerment is an important cross cutting issue and relevant to all IORA priority areas and the cross-cutting focus area of the Blue Economy, and that the full potential of women's contribution to the Indian Ocean Rim remains untapped.

Welcome that the Blue Economy – the sustainable use of marine resources – is a major contributor to regional transformation and growth and provides important opportunities for women to fully participate in and contribute to their own development and success. Women can be encouraged to reach their full potential in a variety of occupations and inclusion throughout Blue Economy value chains, such as in shipping and maritime transport, offshore mining and coastal tourism through better access to education, training, technology and finance.

Note that despite significant progress made in regards to women's economic advancement, multiple barriers and inequity still prevail, in terms of labour market participation and distribution of economic resources. These include job segregation; gender-based violence; unequal access to and control over resources i.e. land, finance, education, health sciences technology; inadequate representation of women in decision-making; and inadequate social safety nets and protection for those engaged in formal and informal economy.

Recognise the need for bold and sound socio-economic policies, programs and projects aimed at addressing the root causes of the gender inequalities.

Reiterate the need for multi-sectoral engagement and the complementary roles that the public sector; multilateral organisations; private businesses; civil society; academia and communities, as well as men, boys and champions for gender equality, as instrumental in driving our shared vision for a peaceful and prosperous Indian Ocean for all;

Member States hereby affirm to promote women's economic empowerment by affirming to:

1. Emphasize the importance of mainstreaming gender perspectives when devising and implementing IORA programmes and policies, as well as during analysis, monitoring and evaluation processes undertaken by Member States and the Secretariat, including projects funded by the Special Fund;
2. Collect, analyse and share gender-disaggregated data on the status of women in IORA countries, specific to IORA priority areas whilst adopting specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound targets and processes to address the prevailing gender gaps;
3. Adopt concrete measures and innovative policies that aim to promote women's and girls' participation and skills development in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, including Information and Communication Technologies in the light of the looming fourth industrial revolution by creating an enabling environment as well as providing incentives to women and girls innovators; including the setting up of appropriate and relevant mentorship programmes and initiatives for the young girls to enable them to harness their full potential;
4. Promote an enhanced representation of women in leadership and in the workforce at the top and middle managerial levels by intensifying human capital development; capacity and capability development programmes that would seek to empower women on a level playing field; whilst addressing the structural barriers that contribute to the importance of economic empowerment.
5. Consolidate investments in programmes for women engaged in micro, small, medium enterprises, and self-help programmes and cooperatives in terms of their ongoing and sustained capability and skills development; ease of doing business incentives; favorable tax incentives and schemes; development of "niche" markets within the IORA community, including the use and expansion of the value chains concept; as well as the adoption of innovative e-commerce and e-learning tools and methodologies;
6. Encourage the IORA Women's Business Forum to empower and strengthen women to champion an inclusive business agenda and network for women entrepreneurs. It will function as a platform

for knowledge exchange, skills development, mentoring, showcasing best practices, facilitating new businesses and investment opportunities.

7. Support the implementation of the IORA Memorandum of Understanding for the Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) which provides a framework for capacity building, particularly to develop and support women-owned and -led SMEs which are crucial economic units driving employment creation and poverty alleviation and which require improved access to capital, markets and technology.
8. Develop sound, macro and gender-sensitive, planning and budgeting strategies, and strengthen measures that lead to an increased diversification in employment sector, with particular attention to those sectors that are traditionally male dominated, with adequate budgetary resources;
9. Build greater synergies between the public and private sectors to advocate and network, including the prioritization of sound and non-discriminatory practices and regulation to expand opportunities for women in businesses and enterprises, including the formal sector;
10. Affirm the Working Group for Women's Economic Empowerment as the vehicle to contribute to gender equity and equality in the IORA region, including to enhance awareness and understanding about the role and contribution of women to economic development and create an enabling environment in which women and girls can reach their full economic potential through increased social awareness and provision of economic opportunities;
11. Collaborate with international, regional and specialised organisations on research and initiatives to improve women's abilities as entrepreneurs, innovators and leaders, including resource mobilization, capacity building, access to regional and international markets, exchange programs between centres and institutions of learning, and promotion of the Women's Empowerment Principles.

Adopted in Balaclava, Mauritius on 29 August 2018.