Speech of Hon. N. Bodha, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade of the Republic of Mauritius on the occasion of the Handing Over Ceremony of the Chair of the Contact Group on Piracy Off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS)

Sofitel Imperial Hotel, Flic en Flac, Mauritius

27 February 2020
Her Excellency, Ambassador Dr. Monica Juma, Defence Cabinet Secretary of Kenya and Incoming Chairperson of the Contact Group on Piracy Off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS),

Mr Raj Mohabeer, Representative of the Indian Ocean Commission,

Their Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning and welcome to you all.

To Your Excellency, Defence Cabinet Secretary, and our dear friends from Kenya, I wish to extend a special warm welcome. I wish you an enjoyable stay in the west coast of Mauritius.

It is not an understatement to say that Mauritius and Kenya have a deep and enduring relationship. The bonds of friendship that connects our two nations know no bound. These were further cemented by the state visit to Mauritius of His Excellency Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya, last year. This landmark visit honoured our land. It attested to the strength and vitality of our ties and of our
shared ambition to move together in the pursuit for sustainable and inclusive development.

Among the many linkages that unite Mauritius and Kenya and guide our common destiny, maritime security certainly stands out as an increasingly important one.

Washed by the waves of the same ocean, our two countries, indeed, share the same conviction that the imperatives of lasting maritime security can only be attained if we join forces to strengthen maritime governance in pursuit of rules-based, sustainable use of seas and oceans.

This conviction underpins our common commitment to the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) and to its continued effectiveness.

Allow me, therefore, to thank and congratulate the Government of Kenya for having decisively accepted to assume the Chairmanship of the CGPCS.

The distinguished presence of our dear sister, Her Excellency, the Defence Cabinet Secretary of Kenya at this official Handing Over Ceremony of the Chairmanship of the GGPCS bears ample testimony to the commitment of Kenya to advancing the regional maritime security agenda.

I salute this commitment and commend the leadership of Kenya.
Today’s ceremony demonstrates the willingness of the Governments of frontline states of the Indian Ocean Region to join hands in combatting the scourge of piracy through the CGPCS and beyond.

We have always held the view that piracy is a complex issue with root causes being poverty, instability and weak rule of law.

We have also recognized that addressing piracy successfully requires a comprehensive approach combining different types of interventions: military; legal and judicial; development and capacity building; and, finally, political and diplomatic efforts.

The CGPCS, in taking such an approach, has been instrumental in the successful fight against piracy in the Horn of Africa.

I wish here to extend my gratitude and thanks to the international community, the UN systems, the EU and the Indian Ocean Commission, in particular, for the efforts deployed in effectively curtailing acts of piracy, thus enhancing the stability of our economies and the region at large.

It is gratifying to note that both Mauritius and Kenya are signatories to the regional Maritime Security (MASE) agreements. These instruments are paving the
way for the systematic exchange and sharing of maritime information at the regional level and for coordination of operations at sea.

It is also a matter of pride that, today, due to our concerted efforts along with the Comoros, Djibouti, France, Madagascar and Seychelles, the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre and Regional Coordination of Operations Centre are operational.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

In a world of shifting geo-political powers, never has maritime security become so critical to the overall international security.

In so far our region is concerned, maritime security has an added dimension as it is intrinsically linked to our aspirations to develop the ocean economy as the new frontier of sustainable growth.

Therefore, an enhanced maritime domain awareness is key to enable us suppress the various forms of maritime crimes and unlock the development of the ocean economy.

The figures are self-revealing: 38 coastal and island states, 13 million km² of collective exclusive economic zones and a coastline of over 47,000 km, providing
livelihood to some 12 million people on the African continent, in the fisheries sector only.

There is, therefore, enormous untapped potential to develop Africa’s ocean economy, whilst keeping in view the AU Agenda 2063 which seeks to reduce poverty, create employment and promote economic growth.

Following the productive outcomes of the successful Blue Economy Summit hosted by Nairobi, I have no doubt that this is an area of cooperation that we should envisage with a view to reducing poverty and boosting the Blue or Ocean industry for the prosperity of our people.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Indian Ocean, our ocean, has become a pivotal zone of competition. The bordering countries represent an economic space of great potential and opportunities with a market of almost 3 billion people and a Gross Domestic Product of US$ 9 trillion.

On the other hand, from the Mozambican Canal, through the Arabian Sea up to the Malacca Straits, the coastline of the Indian Ocean is endowed with vast oil and gas deposits. Besides, 80% of the gas and oil trade ply through the Indian Ocean.
This vast economic potential is threatened by a multitude of forces and maritime crimes. It is estimated that maritime crimes over the last 10 years have cost the Indian Ocean Economies some US$ 13 billion. It is, therefore, imperative that we join hands together to ensure that such loss is minimized.

It is with these perspectives in mind that the focus of the chairmanship of Mauritius of the CGCPS was Maritime Safety and Security.

As a reflection of this focus, Mauritius successfully organised the 1st and 2nd editions of the Ministerial Conference on Maritime Safety and Security. This year, we shall be organizing the 3rd edition of the Conference. As announced by the Hon. Prime Minister at the last AU Summit in Addis Ababa, we are calling for the organization of a World Summit on Maritime Security. The Summit seeks to bridge the gap between the Indo Pacific Strategy and the Maritime Security Architecture of the South West Indian Ocean Region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our motto for the past two years was “United we stand and divided we fall”. I am convinced that together we can achieve our goals as new threats are being reported. I have in mind the proliferation of maritime crimes related to trade in
illicit drugs, arms trafficking, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, human trafficking, terrorism and extremism.

I need not emphasize the increasing volume of plastic debris in our seas and its impacts on ocean health and climate change. As leaders and decision makers, and more importantly as ocean guardians, it is our duty to preserve and sustain our ocean as a legacy to our future generations.

To this end, I have created at the level of my Ministry an Indian Ocean Desk which will be responsible for Maritime Safety and Security Affairs. It will also be coordinating the development of the Blue/Ocean Industry and the development of renewable energy. The Desk will also be responsible for the coordination and monitoring of the impacts of climate change on our ocean. Research and Development and innovations will be the driving force for a Sustainable Ocean.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we are preparing for this Handing Over Ceremony, allow me to highlight some of the achievements of the Mauritius Chairmanship.

Mauritius has been actively participating in the plenary sessions of the CGPCS and related working groups. Mauritius has been co-chairing with Portugal the

It is against this backdrop that Mauritius has assumed the Chairmanship of the CGPCS for a two-year mandate on 1 January 2018. We sought to build on the powerful legacy of the previous Chair, Seychelles, to whom we remain very grateful for guiding and supporting us all through.

As Chair, Mauritius has endeavoured to revamp the Contact Group by transforming it into a permanent structure and by enlarging its mandate to cover other maritime related crimes. These proposals were mooted at the 21st plenary session of the CGPCS and were discussed at the Friends of the Chair meeting held in Copenhagen in May 2019. Although these proposals have still to acquire gravity Mauritius has been able to instill such reflections in discussions on the future of the Contact Group.

In this respect, the last plenary session of the CGPCS resolved to set up a Strategic Planning Steering Group to develop a strategic plan to map out future CGPCS priorities.

I have the pleasure to announce that consultations are being held on the Terms of Reference of the Strategic Planning Steering Group and a meeting would soon be held in Vienna to chart the way forward.
Mauritius has also viewed the premature release of the Somali pirates with concern as it undermines the collective actions of the international community in combating and suppressing piracy off the coast of Somalia.

We have mobilised international awareness on this challenge and called upon the UN Secretary-General to inform the Security Council of the premature release on grounds that it is a breach of the provisions of the MoU signed by Seychelles and the competent authorities in Somaliland in the margins of the London Conference on Somalia in February 2012. This premature release compromises the agreed arrangements providing for the repatriation of such individuals to their home country to serve their sentence on a humanitarian basis.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

However, it would appear that we have been victims of our success. While acts of piracy have dwindled over time [with only 9 incidents of attempted piracy and armed robbery of vessels recorded in 2018] as a result of the deployment of naval forces in the region. The CGPCS has proven its continued relevance. Nevertheless, there has been less interest in sustaining the UN Counter Piracy Trust Fund.

For the past consecutive years, we have not been able to mobilise the UN Development Group threshold requirement of 2 million USD in annual
contributions. This is a matter of great concern since the Trust Fund has been very instrumental in funding the prosecution of suspected pirates and building capacity of the prosecuting countries.

This is certainly one of the challenges which would confront the chairmanship of Kenya of the Contact Group.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Throughout our chairmanship, we have become increasing alive to the fact that given the interconnected nature of maritime insecurities, one must also duly address land-based issues, including, poverty, weak governance and instability as these allow criminal networks to proliferate and adapt.

Indeed, although acts of piracy have been contained, there are risks of its resurgence. We should thus remain on our guard. The capacity and capabilities of the piracy networks cannot be underestimated. If piracy is left unattended, it may contribute to economic failures of many states of the region.

A second lesson we have leant is that by their very nature, maritime insecurities are regional and transnational. Therefore, national maritime capacity building processes need to be considered in relation to wider regional approaches. More importantly, there is a need for a strong regional secretarial infrastructure for

– firstly, archival, institutional memory purposes;
second, better planning strategies and coordination, in the light of multiple and overlapping marine security related initiatives; and

- for better decision-making, inclusiveness and ownership purposes.

This is rationale for our proposal for the IOC to provide the necessary secretarital back-up for the CGCPS. On behalf of the Group and on behalf of the IOC Secretariat, I wish to thank the Government of the Republic of Kenya for seconding an official to assist the CGPCS Secretariat based at the IOC in Mauritius. Excellency, Mauritius will be following suit, very shortly. The secretariat will, of course, operate under the authority of the Chair.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is with great pleasure and with a sense of accomplishment that, on behalf of the Government of Mauritius and Indian Ocean Commission, I hand over the Chairmanship of the CGPCS to Kenya through her Excellency, Ambassador Monica Juma, Defence Cabinet Secretary. I am confident of her able leadership in taking forward the chairmanship of the CGPCS to new heights and in raising the profile of the CGPCS within the international community. Her authoritative standing as a former Foreign Affairs Cabinet Secretary speaks for itself.

Excellency, Kenya may rest assured of the unflinching support of Mauritius in the anticipated successful delivery of this mandate.