It gives me immense pleasure to extend to you all a very cordial welcome to Mauritius on the occasion of the First IORA Blue Economy Conference.

I would like to thank the Right Honourable Prime Minister for having accepted to grace the opening ceremony of the Conference this morning and to deliver the keynote address. This
bears testimony to the high importance that Mauritius attaches to this landmark event. I wish to express a special word of welcome to Honourable Steven Ciobo from Australia, the current chair of the IORA.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to IORA Member States and to the IORA Secretariat for their contribution and collaboration towards the organisation of this Conference.

**Excellencies**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Mauritius is indeed honoured to host this First Conference. The Conference is about the blue economy, portraying the huge watery and maritime domain that our IORA region is blessed with. It is about the Indian Ocean and its potential: “The Indian Ocean” as Robert Kaplan has aptly said in his book “Monsoon” “will be the true nexus of world power in the coming years”. We need to recognize the importance of seas along which 90% of the global trade and two-thirds of petroleum supplies travel.

This Conference, therefore, emerges not simply as a festival of ideas but also as telling barometer of the mood of all the IORA countries willing to forge ahead in ocean development. This sense of expectation and wanting to deliver quickly is very visible in policy discussions, especially in Mauritius, where we now have a clear vision of not only what we want to achieve but also how to achieve it. The challenges are manifold, quite tall in order, but with the spirit of co-operation and the feeling of all countries being on the roll, we can make it. One major expected outcome from the Conference is a Road Map that can make the Ocean Economy work. Other follow-up conferences are envisaged, as I am told
that ocean development will occupy a prominent place on the IORA agenda for the next decade.

Currently, there is also a flurry of other activities in the area of ocean development at the level of the IORA, namely the laudable Sri Lankan Centre of Excellence (CoE) on Ocean Studies and Environment and the upcoming second Indian Ocean Dialogue to be hosted by Australia on 6 and 7 September 2015.

We see this first Conference on the Blue Economy as an offshoot of the first IORA Economic and Business Conference and also as a means to streamline discussions held on the subject in different IORA fora.

**Excellencies**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

IORA Member States have a collective vision for an equitable development of the Blue Economy as an important pillar for sustainable growth.

We have in our region countries which already have advanced know–how in specific sectors of the ocean economy. The commitment of more advanced members of the IORA to develop the blue economy and to assist other members to pursue their quest in exploring this sector and in making it an income generating industry is desirable. The IORA can also explore the possibility of facilitating and coordinating a sharing of experiences among the members of the Association.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**
Sustained regional co-operation efforts in ocean development can, in the long run, transform the IORA region into a model for inclusive and sustainable development. In this respect, I would like to encourage both public and private sector representatives present today to work towards achieving this long term vision.

I shall conclude by saying that I am confident that this Conference will come up with concrete and practical recommendations for the advancement of ocean development in IORA Member States.

With these concluding words, I wish you all success in your deliberations.

I thank you for your attention.