

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) for hosting the budget vote article writing competition and for the 30th March 2017 DIRCO Open Day invitation. As an International Relations student, I have always wanted to participate in some DIRCO events and I am pleased that DIRCO is continuously providing such opportunities.

I am especially grateful to Mr Makaya, the Deputy Director-General and Mr Mnguni, the Acting Deputy Director at the Africa Division for the highly informative open day discussions they held with me and a small group of undergraduate colleagues from UNISA and the University of Pretoria.

ACRONYMNS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| DC | Developing Country |
| DIRCO | Department of International Relations and Cooperation |
| IO | International Organisation |
| IORA | Indian Ocean Rim Association |
| JC | Jakarta Concord |
| LDC | Least Developed Country |
| SIDS | Small Island Developing States |
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| UN | United Nations |

The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is an international organisation (IO) comprising 21 Member States - Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, UAE and Yemen (IORA.net). It is the largest international organisation outside the UN that South Africa is a member of, hence the assumption of Chair of IORA by South Africa for two years from October 2017 is of significant importance. According to Ngqulunga (2017):

“The IORA’s vast coastline holds two thirds of the world’s oil reserves, carries half of the world’s container ships and one third of the bulk cargo traffic and produces goods and services worth over US\$1 trillion, with intra-IORA trade amounting to some US\$777 billion”.

Clearly, taking a seat at the helm of such an IO presents a new set of opportunities for South Africa and Africa as a whole. South Africa’s turn could not have come at a better time - IORA just concluded its first Leaders’ Summit in Indonesia on the 7th March 2017 in commemoration of its 20th Anniversary. The principal outcome of the summit was the Jakarta Concord (JC) which is a set of non-binding international agreements that lay out the foundations for future cooperation within IORA (South Africa. DIRCO 2017). South Africa is thus well positioned to build on the momentum of Jakarta 2017 and to use its position as IORA Chair to set and steer an agenda that will help it reignite its highly staggering economy - which is in turn pivotal to the economy of Africa¹.

Chairing IORA also provides a unique opportunity for South Africa to reclaim its prestige as a formidable international actor, to show its true leadership mantle and to plant the seeds that will help it rise from the ashes of its April 2017 sovereign credit rating downgrades. South Africa can, and should also build onto its leadership status by aligning its interests with the best interests of other DCs, LDCs and SIDS within IORA.

JC articles 9 and 16 affirm the commitment of all members to a number of comprehensive goals, including but not limited to cooperation in six priority areas:

“Maritime safety and security; trade and investment facilitation; fisheries management; disaster risk management; academic, science and technology cooperation; tourism and cultural exchanges”.

However, it may take South Africa a very long time to realise most of these goals through IORA unless it develops, implements and fast track some key innovative solutions: All of these priority areas require highly skilled home grown personnel and in large numbers, whereas

present day South Africa is not obtaining a positive return on investment in her education system. On the other hand, digital technology is increasingly becoming an intrinsic part of every economic activity whereby even small-scale village farmers in Kenya use a mobile app to determine the price of their maize in Nairobi thereby ensuring that no brokers in trucks can dictate the price of their produce (Macharia 2013).

As the Chair of IORA, South Africa will be in a position to design and advocate for the implementation of high-tech skills development exchange programmes with member states like Singapore, Australia, India and Malaysia in addition to existing South-North cooperation projects – and can facilitate the same for other African member states on the basis of JC article 16(e) which provides for cooperation by:

“Increasing opportunities for accessible and affordable scholarships and capacity-building to further human development, with a particular focus on the challenges of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS)”.

Lastly, the opportunity to chair IORA could be and should be a powerful driving force for South Africa to delve deep into her innovative repositories in order to produce and advance the highly skilled labour force required to take full advantage of the promise of a re-awakened IORA and the vast wealth of its ocean. As an IORA troika member since 2015, one can only assume that this is precisely what South African has already been engaged in and is now adding *Phakisa*² model components to the plans that will enable her to take the baton from Indonesia in October, and run with it at full throttle.

Notes:

1. Africa means Africa as a whole, including South Africa!
2. Operation Phakisa - the adaptation by the Government of South Africa of the Big Fast Results (BFR) problem-solving methodology from the government Malaysia (Operation Phakisa).

SOURCES CONSULTED

Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). *IORA Membership*. [O]. Available:
<http://www.iora.net/about-us/membership.aspx>
Accessed on 2017/04/28

Macharia, J. 2013. Kenyan farmers reap the benefits of technology. *Mail & Guardian*, 22 May. [O]. Available
<https://mg.co.za/article/2013-05-22-kenyan-farms-reap-the-benefits-of-technology>
Accessed on 2017/05/01

Ngqulunga, B. 2017. South Africa. The Presidency. *President Zuma arrives in Indonesia for Indian Ocean Rim Association Summit and State Visit*. 5 March. [O]. Available:
<http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/press-statements/president-zuma-arrives-indonesia-indian-ocean-rim-association-summit-and-state>
Accessed on 2017/04/28

Operation Phakisa. *Operation Phakisa: ICT in Education*. [O]. Available:
<http://www.operationphakisa.gov.za/operations/Education%20Lab/pages/default.aspx>
Accessed on 2017/04/30

South Africa. Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). 2017. *Jakarta Concord*. [O]. Available:
<http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2017/iora0309a.pdf>
Accessed on 2017/04/28