**MINISTRY**

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION**

 REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY

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**4278. Ms T P Msane (EFF) to ask the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation:**

How will the lack of ocean security in the Indian Ocean affect the Ocean economy in the context of the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade area**? NW5345E**

**REPLY:**

The Indian Ocean region faces many traditional and non-traditional safety and security challenges including piracy, armed robberies at sea, terrorism, human trafficking, irregular movement of persons, drug trafficking, illicit trafficking in wildlife, trafficking of weapons, crimes in the fisheries sector, degradation of ocean health, unlawful exploitation of marine resources and climate change with its related repercussions on environmental security.

Over 60% of the world’s trade passes through the Indian Ocean and nine African states are members of the Association. Therefore, any impact on trade will impact on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It is therefore important that it is able to succeed and that the safety of sea routes from any of the listed threats is crucial.

In this regard, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) has an established Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security which coordinated the IORA’s role in securing trade routes. Covering a vast maritime zone of nearly 68.56 million sq. km, IORA’s *Maritime Security* includes elements of international peace and security, sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence, security from crimes at sea, security of resources and environmental security, while *Maritime Safety* is concerned with training (both technical and personnel), transport, construction and equipment-related issues, and assistance in distress situations.

A focussed discussion on the AfCFTA is critical to help guide the IORA’s role in enabling the free trade area to ensure mutual benefit. This discussion is encouraged by both the African Union (AU), and the IORA. The IORA has proposed a draft MoU with the AU and this would be crucial to consolidating Africa’s regional maritime interests.

The existing Maritime Safety and Security (MSS) initiatives are the following:

* The ‘IORA Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security’, also known as the WGMSS, established in September 2018 and presently chaired by Sri Lanka. In August 2019, Sri Lanka hosted the First Meeting of the IORA Maritime Safety and Security Working Group, which finalized the regional Work Plan drawn up for a period of two years (2019 – 2021). This meeting provided an opportunity for Member States to discuss the way forward and to initiate concrete actions in the sphere of MSS.
* During the Council of Ministers (COM) held in Dhaka on 24 November 2022, India advised that the Discussion Paper on the draft legal frameworks in the Indian Ocean region in the field of Maritime Safety and Security had been finalised. The draft discussion paper will be taken forward by the Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security (WGMSS) for further implementation.
* Sri Lanka to host the Third Meeting of the IORA WGMSS in the first quarter of 2023 (possibly March), along with a Workshop on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
* IORA has also devised flagship initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Dialogue, which is held annually, bringing together key representatives including scholars, experts, analysts, and policy makers from think tanks, civil societies and governments from IORA Member States to discuss pertinent issues including MSS.
* The IORA aims at building upon existing national, regional and multilateral measures to support a more effective utilization of resources for enhanced cross-border cooperation and sharing of knowledge, experiences and best practices to secure the Indian Ocean as an ocean strengthening maritime cooperation for a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region.