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Ocean States establish Tourism Core Group to drive sustainable tourism growth in the Indian Ocean Region

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SOUTH AFRICA - Tourism Ministers of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) met in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape to formalise the establishment of a Core Group that will advance tourism within the Indian Ocean region.

Member states from Southern and Eastern Africa, the Gulf, South Asia, and the South Eastern Indian Ocean endorsed Terms of Reference (ToR) for the IORA Tourism Core Group which is poised to boost cultural and eco-tourism, lead to advancements in cruise tourism, and the development of capacity building community-based tourism projects.

Today's event marked the 2nd gathering of the IORA Tourism Ministers since the adoption of the Jakarta Concord in 2017, and the IORA Action Plan (2017 – 2021), which set measurable targets to the commitment made by member states to foster tourism and cultural exchanges.

South African Minister of Tourism and IORA Chairperson, Mr. Derek Hanekom, welcomed delegates to the windy city of Port Elizabeth, and expressed the country's commitment to the development objectives of IORA's flagship initiative as an instrument for advancing significant beneficiation for coastal communities through sustainable and inclusive tourism.

“The establishment of the IORA Tourism Core Group is an historic milestone. Through this structure we will be able to streamline tourism development planning and implementation for the Indian Ocean region.”

“Our partnerships and collaborative efforts will demonstrate credence and impact as we set about to achieve the association's objectives, and make our mark towards the attainment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals,” said Hanekom.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), tourism can address some of the global challenges by implementing policies and initiatives aligned to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Tourism efforts must promote employment creation and the consumption of locally produced products, whilst purporting responsible tourism practices that will help conserve environmental, coastal and marine resources.

With approximately 2.7 billion of the world's population living in the Indian Ocean region, tourism remains a unique selling point given its abundance of environmental, coastal and marine resources. It will be critical for IORA member states to explore the use of its diverse natural resources to capture a share of the 1.8 billion international tourist market that the UNWTO anticipates by 2030.

“The Association has an obligation to promote sustainable development. As we strive to advance tourism, we should be mindful that protecting our natural resources is a collective responsibility,” added Hanekom.

South Africa's contribution to the development of the Blue Economy is progressing steadily under Operation Phakisa, which was launched in 2014. The country's participation in the IORA Tourism Core Group will further its economic performance, and unlock unchartered opportunities identified under Operation Phakisa - namely: marine transport and manufacturing activities; offshore oil

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and gas exploration; aquaculture and marine protection services; ocean governance; coastal and marine tourism (CMT), and small harbours.

The 2nd IORA Tourism Ministers Meeting culminated with the adoption of the Nelson Mandela Bay Declaration that committed, inter alia, to the establishment of the IORA Tourism Resource Centre in the Sultanate of Oman in support of the IORA Tourism Core Group; improved travel facilitation and region connectivity; and to unlocking the tourism potential of the ocean's economy of the region.

For Further information on the IORA Nelson Mandela Bay Declaration, visit www.iora.int/en

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