



MEDIA RELEASE

Launch of IORA Indian Ocean University Network (UNIOR)



Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Secretary-General H.E. Mr Salman Al Farisi formally launched the IORA Indian Ocean University Network (UNIOR) at Curtin University's campus in Mauritius on Friday 15 November 2024.

Utilising 'academic diplomacy', UNIOR's vision is to be a "dynamic regional academic platform delivering higher education and research collaboration to address sustainable development and transformation priorities, build leadership and institutional capacity, and promote regional cooperation across the Indian Ocean."



The Launch Forum featured a keynote address on “Sustainability Transformations: Implications for the Indian Ocean Region” by Professor Maano Ramutsindela, Future Africa Research Chair in Sustainability Transformations at the University of Cape Town/University of Pretoria, South Africa.



The keynote was followed by a panel discussion on “Building University Collaboration for Sustainable Transformation in the Indian Ocean Region”, featuring Mr Al Farisi, Professor Ramutsindela as well as H.E. Kate Chamley, Australia’s High Commissioner to Mauritius, Professor Françoise Driver, SSR Chair in African Studies, University of Mauritius, and Professor Ajay Dubey, Professor of International Studies and former Rector, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India.

The objectives of UNIOR are threefold. The first objective, *Regional university collaboration for sustainable transformation*, empowers UNIOR “to be a flagship IORA platform delivering impactful research and education collaboration to advance knowledge and serve the particular sustainable development and transformation needs of the Indian Ocean region, as identified in the IORA Priority Areas and UN Sustainable Development Goals.”



The second objective, *Growing regional leaders and education institutions*, positions the Network “to facilitate and support regular regional exchanges between academics, students, university leaders and partners to share expertise, build capacity in the next generation of leaders and institutions, and enhance the ‘IOR literacy’ of the Indian Ocean Rim academic community”, while the third objective, *Supporting IORA’s region-building*, means that UNIOR will help to “build a transnational Indian Ocean community and regional identity among the diverse peoples of IORA and enhance the capacity of IORA and its Member States to promote regional cooperation.”

The design and development of UNIOR has been led by Associate Professor David Mickler, Curtin’s Dean Global, Africa, in his capacity as Australia’s Representative to the Indian Ocean Rim Academic Group (IORAG). The establishment of UNIOR is a formal Action Item in the IORAG Work Plan 2022-27 and it has been developed in consultation with IORAG members, the IORA Secretariat, partner universities and other experts, including former IORA Chair of Indian Ocean Studies (CIOS), Professor V. N. Attri.

UNIOR will be based on an institutional membership model, with expressions of interest now sought from up to three universities per IORA Member State and one university per IORA Dialogue Partner state. Universities joining on or before 30 June 2025 will be granted Founding Member status. The Network will convene an annual High-Level Forum, regional short courses, collaborative research seed grants, and promote academic exchanges, emphasising IORA’s Priority and Focus Areas and the UN SDGs.

The Network will be Co-Chaired by Curtin Mauritius and the University of Mauritius. A Steering Committee will be established, comprised of Network member representatives, as well as a Network Secretariat. UNIOR will formally commence operations on 1 July 2025.



The UNIOR Launch Forum also represented the culmination of the annual IORA short course in Mauritius on “International Relations in the Indian Ocean Region”, a collaboration between the IORA Secretariat and nine existing Indian Ocean regional partner universities: Curtin University (Australia) and the University of Mauritius (co-hosts), the University of Pretoria (South Africa), Jawaharlal Nehru University (India), the University of Dhaka (Bangladesh), the University of Nairobi (Kenya), the University of Seychelles and Université de La Réunion.



The annual collaborative course, which has been delivered since 2017, including previously in Jakarta and Pretoria, brings together students and academic staff from the partner universities to collectively study the regional dynamics of the IOR and to build people-to-people links, cross-cultural awareness and professional networks through engagement with academics, diplomats and peers. The course was co-funded by the IORA Special Fund, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and university partners. UNIOR emerges from the strong foundations established by this successful regional academic partnership.

