

## Colombo Declaration

Indian Ocean Region (IOR) Interior Ministers met on 4th November 2016 in a high-level meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The resolution was adopted by 18 littoral states to make IOR, a 'Drug-Free Zone,' and the resolution came to be known as the Colombo Declaration.

The meeting was co-hosted by the **Government of Sri Lanka** and the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**.

### Who were the attendees in the Colombo Declaration?

- The meeting was attended by delegates from 18 littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which included seven ministers and Deputy Ministers of Home Affairs/Interior.
- It was even attended by seven international organisations and UN agencies who are involved in counternarcotics activities in the region.
- Upon making the declaration, Tofik Murshudlu, the head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stated that *"In the future, the drug enforcement agencies and partner agencies will coordinate their efforts through the mechanism of the Southern Route Partnership which we believe will disrupt the flow of drugs in the Indian Ocean"*.

### What is the Need for the meeting?

The Ministers discussed the need to develop a regional approach and cooperation to combat the growth in drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean region. During the high-level meeting a conference paper was presented, whereby the threat posed to Indian Ocean states by drug trafficking was assessed. Special attention was also paid to the threat of narco-criminality infiltrating Indian Ocean States.

### Why was this resolution adopted?

Two of the biggest narcotics superhighways, the [Golden Triangle](#) in South East Asia and the Golden Crescent in South- West Asia, make use of the waters of the Indian Ocean to ferry their goods around illegally. In fact, it is these maritime routes that account for a significant portion of opium and heroin from Afghanistan that are trafficked along the East African coast. Both the route of the Golden Triangle and [Golden Crescent](#) can be seen in the image below:



The increase in the volumes of illicit drugs along the coastlines of Eastern Africa highlights the importance of the islands that dot the Indian Ocean. Over the last three years, about 9300 kg of heroin has been seized by the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) in trading dhows, further strengthening the argument of the Indian Ocean being a transit point for the world's narcotics supply.

Thus to better combat this drug menace, the Columbo resolution was adopted.

### What are the Features of the Colombo Declaration?

- The declaration emphasizes the need for cooperation amongst the coastal areas, more closely in order to share information in narcotic drug trafficking, provide mutual legal assistance and enforce the maritime law.
- It also calls for the development and expansion of communication. It could be carried out through the Indian Ocean Prosecutors Network of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC's).
- The declaration calls on the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region to hold meetings on a yearly basis within the framework of the Southern Route Partnership (SRP) of the Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime (IOFMC). These states need to assess and share reports on the threat of drug trafficking in the IOR, which would in turn help in developing a coordinated approach for countering such threats.

## What are the issues/concerned?

- The growing level of drug trafficking on the Southern Route proliferating in the Indian Ocean, the disruptions of other trafficking routes, the linkage to other forms of crime, and the destabilising effect not only on individual states, but the wider region of the Indian Ocean, where an estimated 9,300 kg of high purity drugs have been seized within the past three years.
- The health risks associated with local drug use due to increased drug trafficking, specifically the correlation between high opiate abuse and HIV/Hepatitis C transmissions.
- The key attraction of the Southern Route for narcotic trafficking is the lack of jurisdictional authority for enforcement activity on the high seas and/ or difficulty to enforce an effective deterrence mechanism through a legal finish or punitive sentence.
- The need for coastal states to cooperate more closely on enforcing maritime law, sharing information, and providing mutual legal assistance, including the expansion and development of communication through UNODC's Indian Ocean Prosecutors Network.
- The work already undertaken by various international partners to disrupt illicit trafficking networks in the region.
- The need for a coordinated approach through the Southern Route Partnership (SRP) of the Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime (IOFMC) convened by the Global Maritime Crime Programme of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, to improve maritime law enforcement effectiveness and cooperation.
- Narcotic drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean poses a threat to peace and security in the region and its possible link to organized crime and funding of terrorism.

### *Call for Action*

The declaration calls for action of the Ministers of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean:

- To work towards making the Indian Ocean a "Drug-Free Zone".
- To identify priority areas and aim at enhanced regional cooperation to develop appropriate measures to counter illicit drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean.
- To meet on an annual basis within the framework of the Southern Route Partnership (SRP) of Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime (IOFMC) to assess and report on the drug trafficking threat in the Indian Ocean and develop a coordinated approach to counter such threats.