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MINISTRY OF TOURISM, ARTS AND CULTURE

PRESS RELEASE

**INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION (IORA) WORKSHOP TO
RAISE AWARENESS OF COASTAL AND MARINE PROTECTION
AND CONSERVATION ISSUES AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO THE
BLUE ECONOMY**

1st November 2023 - The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) 'Workshop to Raise Awareness of Coastal and Marine Protection and Conservation Issues and its Importance to the Blue Economy' jointly organised by Malaysia through the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) and the Centre for Marine and Coastal Studies (CEMACS), Universiti Sains Malaysia in partnership with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), runs from 31 October 2023 to 2 November 2023 in JEN Penang Georgetown.

The international workshop brings together more than 60 government officials, researchers and scientists within the fields of tourism, marine science and the Blue Economy. The participants comprise of representatives from 11 IORA member states and dialogue partners, including Comoros,

France, Iran, Madagascar, Mauritius, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Tanzania. The workshop also features 6 keynote speakers with expertise in the relevant fields from Japan, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand.

As nearly 80% of all tourism is concentrated in coastal areas making up a significant part of the Blue Economy, the IORA workshop aims to provide a platform for member states to share research findings, exchange ideas and best practices, as well as propose practical recommendations towards strengthening the policy, legal and institutional framework for coastal and marine resource conservation and the sustainable development of coastal and marine tourism.

The workshop, which is partially supported by IORA through its Special Fund under Project A3.1 of the IORA Core Group on Tourism (CGT) Work Plan 2022-2027, is also in line with Malaysia's National Tourism Policy (2020-2030), which focuses on branding Malaysia as a premier ecotourism destination by championing responsible tourism practice in environmentally fragile areas such as its coastal areas and marine parks.

The Opening Ceremony of the workshop was jointly officiated by Ms. Zelda Vrolick, Director of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Dr. Yasmeeen Yasim, Senior Director of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC) and Prof. Dato' Dr. Aileen Tan Shau Hwai, Director of the Centre for Coastal and Marine Studies (CEMACS), Universiti Sains Malaysia.

In her opening address, Dr. Yasmeeen Yasim, in her capacity as official representative of H.E. Dato' Roslan Tan Sri Abdul Rahman, Secretary-General of MOTAC, acknowledged that tourism is an important contributor to the economy that generated over \$18 billion USD in revenue in 2019. "Currently, Malaysia's tourism industry enjoys a healthy recovery at more than 70% of pre-pandemic levels in 2023. That said, it is imperative that tourism in the post-COVID-19 era not only focuses on recovery in terms of numbers but also on strengthening resilience and preparedness for new or unforeseen challenges," Dr. Yasmeeen remarked.

"With growing threats to the health of marine and coastal ecosystems as a result of direct human impacts and climate change, experts have suggested that mainstreaming a

sustainable Blue Economy approach to coastal and marine tourism development holds a wealth of potential for impactful investments alongside inclusive and sustainable growth that balances the protection of ecosystems and livelihoods," she said.

"Therefore, I hope the engaging sessions of this workshop will inspire deep insights on the challenges, opportunities and practical solutions that can benefit IORA member states," Dr. Yasmeen concluded.

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