



PACIFIC SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

United Nations Member States

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Statement of the Pacific Small Island Developing States On Consideration of Agenda Item 77 Oceans and Law of the Sea Tuesday, 5 December 2017 – New York

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the 12 members of the Pacific Small Island Developing States namely the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

At the outset, the PSIDS we would like to thank Mr. Thembile Joyini of South Africa, Mr. Andreas Kravik of Norway, Mr. Pablo Arrocha of Mexico and Ms. Kate Neilson of New Zealand for their able leadership in bringing these negotiations to their successful conclusion and we are pleased to support the adoption of these resolutions on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, Sustainable Fisheries and BBNJ.

Mr. President,

We attach particular importance to this agenda item. As we have often said, we consider the ocean the lifeblood of our economies and our societies. We are therefore keenly attuned to the mounting negative impacts on its health, driven by human activity. Overfishing, as well as illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, marine pollution including from microplastics, the destruction of marine habitats and other threats to marine biodiversity, including climate-change driven impacts such as ocean acidification are among a number of serious threats to the health and resilience of our shared ocean.

These serious and mounting impacts are not merely threats to our ocean, but constitute a serious challenge to our sustainable development and our ability to meet the aspirations encompassed in the 2030 agenda. Healthy, productive, and resilient oceans and seas are critical for inter alia, poverty eradication, access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, economic development, and essential ecosystem services.

Mr. President,

The PSIDS were at the forefront of those advocating for the inclusion among the SDGs of a standalone goal dedicated to the Conservation and Sustainable Use of our Oceans and Seas.

This was reflected in SDG 14 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and we look forward to the critical work of implementation to meet the targets on protecting marine ecosystems, on addressing acidification, ending IUU fishing, and increasing benefits to SIDS and LDCs among others. In this regard, we welcome the first United Nations Conference to support the implementation of SDG 14 and its outcomes. The Call for Action should help guide our work towards meeting the targets which we have established. We were pleased that the final Call for Action recognizes the special case of SIDS and the unique relationship which SIDS have with the ocean. We congratulate the co-facilitators of the process, the H.E. Mr. Alvaro Mendonça Moura of Portugal and H.E. Mr. Burhan Gafoor of Singapore for their stellar work.

We also welcome the appointment of Peter Thomson as special envoy for the Ocean, and assure him of our support in his work to galvanize concerted efforts to follow up on the outcomes of the United Nations (UN) Ocean Conference in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and maintaining the momentum for action to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Mr. President,

Pacific SIDS are not alone in reacting with deep concern to the findings of the World Ocean Assessment that delays in implementing solutions to the problems that have already identified as threatening to degrade the world's oceans will lead, unnecessarily, to incurring greater environmental, social and economic costs.

Given the critical role which oceans, and oceans health, play for our societies and for our development, this news is stark indeed. Especially when coupled with the increasing adverse impacts which climate change and CO2 emissions are having on our oceans and seas.

Indeed, climate change will be the defining security challenge of the century, and we are simply not prepared for life in a hotter climate. For this reason, we reiterate our call for the appointment of a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on climate and Security, whose first task should be an assessment of the United Nations' capacity to respond to climate emergencies.

In a similar vein, we note that reports such as the United Nations World Ocean Assessment, lend urgency to the work undertaken by the Preparatory Committee to develop a legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. During the preparatory committee meetings held in 2016 and 2017 we made substantial progress and we welcome the launching of the intergovernmental conference to elaborate the text for the international agreement.

Mr. President,

Work on Ocean issues is not confined to New York but also connects to our region. In this regard, we welcome the recent deposit of coordinates delimiting the borders between the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Palau and Papua New Guinea in accordance with article 74 of the Convention.

Mr. President,

We continue to acknowledge the contribution of the International Seabed Authority for the ongoing capacity building initiatives targeting developing countries, and look forward to further progressing the development of a comprehensive set of rules governing seabed mining to ensure the effective protection of the marine environment from harmful effects that may arise from activities in the Area. We have stated on numerous occasions just how important the work of the ISA is to the PSIDS, with our exclusive economic zones amounting to more than 30 million square kilometers and directly being adjoined to the lucrative Clarion Clipperton Zone.

We also acknowledge the important contributions of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. We therefore welcome the steps taken, including particularly contributions to the DOALOS Trust Fund, to ensure developing states, especially LDCs and SIDS, are able to fully participate in the deliberations of the sub-commissions on their applications.

Mr. President,

The importance of healthy fisheries to our economies and livelihoods cannot be overstated. Tuna, especially, has for centuries provided an important source of food for Pacific islanders employment as well as of intangible cultural and traditional value to our peoples. In addition to the critical economic value of tuna, it plays an important role in the marine ecosystem. Declines in tuna population and changes in their food web dynamics may impair the ocean's capacity to generate basic ecosystem processes which are vital to enable the maintenance and delivery of services benefiting human health, welfare and economic activities. We are therefore pleased to see recognition of World Tuna Day enshrined in the Sustainable Fisheries Resolution.

In addition to the important work we do here at the UN on fisheries, we would like to speak to an important development in our own waters. We welcome the news this past year that big-eye tuna is no longer on a downward spiral, as we have seen with other stocks, We attribute this in part to the work of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement which have put an effective cap on the purse-seine fishery, and we recognize the contribution that marine protected areas in the Pacific are making in this regard, and in enhancing the health, productivity and resilience of the ocean. We would also take this example as a moment to highlight again the critical importance of the precautionary approach.

We also strongly emphasize here, as we did at the Resumed Review Conference, the need for target reference points and rebuild strategies for the management of all fish stocks. This will enable long term sustainable exploitation of such stocks and meet the obligation to ensure that compatible measures are applied in high seas to end the "tragedy of the commons" and see to it that the disproportionate burden of conservation action is not transferred to developing countries, including the PSIDS and SIDS generally.

Finally, we would like to thank DOALOS for their ongoing hard work and support, especially with relation to capacity building and their technical support and legal advice.

Thank you.