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Ambassador Chigiyaal Speaks on Behalf of PIF on Oceans

New York, 7 December 2016 (FSMUN): Today, as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) opened its annual debate on its agenda item on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, Federated States of Micronesia Permanent Representative Ambassador Jane J. Chigiyaal, speaking as Chair of the 18 member Pacific Island Forum, told the world body that “Given the vastness of the Pacific Ocean, we have always seen ourselves as custodians in protecting and sustainably using our Ocean.”

Of the world’s 510 square kilometers total surface area, some 70% of the Earth’s surface is covered by oceans. The largest ocean on Earth is the Pacific Ocean; it covers around 30% of the Earth’s surface.

In her statement to the General Assembly, Ambassador Chigiyaal referenced the *Pohnpei Oceans Statement: A course to Sustainability* adopted by Forum Leaders at the Forty-seventh Pacific Island Forum held this year in the State of Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia. The Ambassador said, “It (Pohnpei Ocean Statement) reinforces the inseparable link between our ocean, seas and Pacific island peoples: their values, traditional practices and spiritual connections.” Ambassador Chigiyaal continued to emphasize that “the Pacific will continue to advocate for a healthy, productive and resilient Ocean here at the United Nations.”

This year, the Ambassador emphasized the universal and unified character of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which she said “[...] remains of vital importance as the basis for national, regional and global action and cooperation in the marine sector, and it should continue to be reflected in the Oceans omnibus resolution.”

The Ambassador especially focused on a number of important events that have occurred during the year which she highlighted with their inter-linkages to UNCLOS.

She spoke of the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee established by UNGA resolution 69/292: *Development of an international legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ)*. While the Ambassador said discussions on the BBNJ were productive and acknowledged the progress made, she however, spoke of her Group’s dismay “[...] that we could not welcome the progress achieved so far in the context of the Oceans Omnibus resolution which could have been a factual statement.” She held out hope that the next March meeting of the preparatory process will continue to make good progress.

In her statement, Ambassador Chigiya also referred to a 2 May event celebrated at the United Nations by the Pacific as World Tuna Day, noting that tuna is an important part of life in the Pacific and elsewhere, she encouraged members of the United Nations to support a draft resolution advocated by the Pacific to designate 2 May of every year as World Tuna Day. At the latest count just before the draft resolution is actioned by the UNGA later in the day, already over 90 countries have sponsored the Pacific initiated draft resolution.

On the Informal Consultative Process (ICP) held in June and which examined *Marine debris, plastics, and micro-plastics*, the Ambassador said the “[...] discussion was both timely and comprehensive, looking at the scale of the problem but also at a comprehensive set of solutions from prevention to removal.” While her Group welcomes the report of the Co-Chairs, she also expressed her group is welcoming the renewed mandate of the ICP and its focus in the coming year on the interaction of Oceans and Climate Change and further elaborated that “(It) is essential that science underpins policy decision making on oceans and fisheries issues.”

As implementation of Sustainable Goal 14 is high on the Pacific agenda, Ambassador Chigiya welcomed the appointment of the Permanent Representatives of Portugal and Singapore to facilitate the preparatory work of the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of SDG 14, which will be co-hosted by Fiji and Sweden in New York next year.

“All stakeholders – states, IGOs, private sector and civil society are called to contribute to this success and to further the agenda by committing themselves fully implementing SDG 14”, she said and “A healthy, productive and resilient Ocean is key to the future of our blue planet.”