

21<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea: Sea-level rise and its impacts - Statement by Portugal

Co-Chairs,

At the outset, Portugal wishes to align itself with the statement previously delivered on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, and would like to join other delegations in thanking you and the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, for the efforts in organizing this year's session in such challenging conditions.

We would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude and sincere appreciation to Ms. Gabrielle Goettsche-Wanli for her exceptional service as Director of DOALOS during the past 7 years and congratulate her successor, and our friend, Mr. Vladimir Jares, wishing him success in the new role.

Co-Chairs,

Portugal's concern with sea-level rise is not new and it has only increased as a result of the research that has been developed over time on this topic, as well as the knowledge and scientific information aggregated in studies such as the IPCC special report on the Ocean and the Cryosphere and the World Ocean Assessment. Resolutely and emphatically, Portugal and like-minded countries have supported the debate on this issue, and we are acutely aware of the impacts of sea-level rise (SLR) on our coastal communities and around the world, particularly in Small Island Developing States.

As a coastal State with archipelagic territories,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of our population lives in coastal areas, facing this challenge on a daily basis, so Portugal strongly welcomes this year's ICP topic as an essential opportunity to increase knowledge and share solutions and best practices on this particular impact of climate change in the Ocean.

A better understanding of ocean climate and ecosystems, as well as human impacts and vulnerabilities, requires the coordination of a continuous and long-term system of ocean observations. Scientific research and observations needs to continue, with the full participation of scientists from all around the world. Already some fundamental tools are in place, such as the Global Ocean Observation System (GOOS) which coordinates observations around the global ocean for three critical themes: climate, ocean health, and real-time services, and the Sea Level Station Monitoring Facility, which provides information about the operational status of global and regional networks of real time sea level stations. At the end of 2020 some 922 active stations were tracked.

The UN Decade of Ocean Science will be crucial in this regard, complementing our current knowledge and improving our scientific understanding of the matter. We must take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Decade and use the best available science to craft possible adaptation solutions that are, ideally, sustainable and based on Nature.

Co-Chairs,

In 2007, an IPCC report underlined that climate-related changes over the 21st century will include an acceleration in Sea-level Rise (SLR), further rise in sea surface temperature, more extreme weather events and storm surges, altered precipitation and ocean acidification.

Within coastal zones, these climate-related changes can be expected to have a range of impacts. Rising sea-levels increase the flood-risk and erosion along the coast, impact on freshwater availability and result in an accelerated loss of coastal ecosystems. Climate experts emphasize the importance of adapting to these potential effects of climate change by developing and implementing coastal protection and climate sensitive adaptation strategies.

Little is known about the actual climate change adaptation practices, legislation and strategies, including related investments, made by the different Member States around the world to protect and adapt their coastal areas against the effects of climate change, in particular SLR.

Portugal believes, that ICP-21 should contribute to a deepening of the knowledge on the matter, at the United Nations level, and to the exchange of experiences and good practices in respect to adaptation which, in our view, require responses at several levels:

- Structural (spatial planning, administrative organization, legislation),
- Physical (coastline protection, adaptation measures in place),
- Institutional (coordination, cooperation, synergies),
- Economic and social (sustainability, resilience, social growth and development),
- Means of implementation (available human and financial resources, adaptive capacity; political will; effective governance).
- Multistakeholder approach

During this session we will intervene on topics relevant to our Delegation, namely, to address some specific issues, such as:

- a) the importance of salt marshes for healthy and productive ecosystems and their contribution to support climate change, and
- b) the importance of conducting SLR risk assessments for evaluating socioeconomic impacts.

Co- Chairs,

To conclude, Portugal would like, once more, to stress the fundamental role of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as the pillar of ocean governance providing the overarching legal framework within which all activities in oceans and seas must be carried out. Portugal has always been and remains a firm supporter of the integrity and universality of the UNCLOS as the ‘Constitution of the Oceans’.

Portugal wishes you and all Delegations a fruitful debate on the very important topic “Sea-level Rise and its Impacts”.