

Opening Statement at BBNJ Intergovernmental Conference-1 from
the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO

Agenda Item 6 – General exchange of views

Mme President, distinguished Delegates,

It is a great honour for me to address the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference, in my capacity as Chair of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO.

As exemplified by numerous scientific studies, the ocean is under increasing pressure as human activities in ABNJ become more widespread, more impactful and more intense. The little that we know about the deep ocean has already revealed a remarkable suite of habitats supporting rich biodiversity. These habitats provide the planet and its inhabitants with crucial ecosystem services, highlighting the need for ecosystem-based and precautionary approaches.

The international community has recognized the need to take a holistic approach to improving cooperation and coordination for securing the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the ABNJ. This means that we need a BBNJ International Legally Binding Instrument that all states can support and which is reliably informed by science across all its components.

Large scale ocean observations are crucial to improve our still very insufficient understanding of how deep ocean ecosystems function, of their roles as reservoirs of biodiversity and genetic resources, and their health status under future scenarios of climate change and human use. In this connection, we should recognize the critical requirement for enhanced, systematic and sustained observation of the global ocean and the need to improve the way in which observation data is managed and made available. There is a real need to improve the scientific knowledge base, in order to be able to make informed management decisions and evaluate the effectiveness of our measures.

The IOC was created in 1960 to promote international cooperation and to coordinate programmes in research, services and capacity building, in order to generate knowledge about the nature and resources of the ocean and coastal areas; and to apply that knowledge for the improvement of management, sustainable development, the protection of the marine environment, and the decision-making processes of its 149 Member States. The IOC's vision is that scientific understanding and systematic observations of the ocean should underpin sustainable development and global governance for a healthy ocean.

Marine scientific research, in particular scientific capacity development, knowledge sharing and other forms of technology transfer, cuts across all four elements of the BBNJ. In this intergovernmental conference, member states will need to design a robust and universal process that allows for the equitable participation of all Member States in the international scientific collaboration and in the generation and sharing of the resulting knowledge. We need to ensure that the best available scientific knowledge is generated and used to inform emerging elements of the future BBNJ instrument. Only with that it will result in the establishment of a robust science-policy interface of the governance structure of the future instrument. In this context, ocean science should be interpreted broadly as including social

sciences and human dimensions; the infrastructure that supports ocean science (observations, data systems); the application of those sciences for societal benefit, including transfer to regions that hitherto have not benefitted; and the science-policy interface.

Mme Chairperson,

In December 2017, The UN proclaimed 2021–2030 as the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and invited the IOC to lead its preparation phase. The Decade provides an opportunity to mobilize research around BBNJ issues and create new connections between ocean observations and science on one hand, and global and regional institutions with a focus on economic development, conservation, and sustainability of ABNJs, on the other hand.

Through its contribution to the Decade, the IOC will lead a number of activities that are highly relevant to the BBNJ process, including :

- The development of an ocean data sharing mechanism, ensuring equitable, fast and free access to research data through a global online open-access data sharing platform and data clearing house mechanism;
- The promotion of a mechanism for coordinating targeted and cooperative marine scientific research resulting in the collection of new baseline data to characterize existing environments and biodiversity, and better understanding of cumulative stressors impacts;
- A reinforced coordination of ocean observation efforts across disciplines, and expansion of existing observation programmes, including through technological advancement in collecting new ecosystem variables that can contribute to ecosystem management;
- improving the scientific knowledge base and transfer of marine technology to regions and groups that are presently limited in capacity and capability, especially SIDS and LDCs, through dedicated training programmes and initiatives, as well as a dedicated clearing house mechanism.
- A global ocean mapping campaign to provide a high resolution map of the seabed (currently only 6% of the seabed is mapped in high resolution);

The Decade will be a vehicle for innovative and transformative action, mobilizing science, and leaving lasting impacts through engagement with end users, delivering the information of greatest importance in meeting sustainable development targets, and informing BBNJ issues. [I also refer to the side event co-hosted by IOC, Palau and Norway during lunch on Thursday the 6th in Room 12. The side event will provide an opportunity to discuss cooperation in science, observation and capacity development to support management in ABNJ.]

In closing, a consolidated approach to harness all efforts on ocean science, Transfer of Marine Technology and Capacity Building will be key in ensuring that we deliver on the global 2030 Agenda, and implement a potential BBNJ instrument. IOC stands ready to support the strengthened implementation of relevant provisions of UNCLOS and could potentially contribute within its mandate to the arrangement and activities under discussion in the BBNJ process.

