**Leveraging UNCLOS and the BBNJ Agreement in support of resilient prosperity in SIDS**

**Side event at the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4)**

Tuesday, 28 May, 13:30-15:00

Overflow ID Room, American University of Antigua,

Osbourn, Antigua and Barbuda

Organized by: Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, UN Office of Legal Affairs (DOALOS), in partnership with the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC), the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

**Objective and description of the event:**

After nearly 20 years of work, the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) was adopted on 19 June 2023 and opened for signature on 20 September 2023. To date, 89 States, including 22 SIDS, and the European Union have signed the Agreement, which requires the deposit of sixty instruments of ratification, approval, acceptance or accession before it can enter into force. Three SIDS, Palau, Belize and Seychelles, have become parties to the Agreement.

Building on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), this historic Agreement is critical for the health and resilience of the ocean and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 14, particularly for its role in contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity. Under the overall objective of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, for the present and in the long-term, through effective implementation of the relevant provisions of UNCLOS and further international cooperation and coordination, the BBNJ Agreement addresses four key elements: marine genetic resources, including the fair and equitable sharing of benefits; measures such as area-based management tools, including marine protected areas; environmental impact assessments; and capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology.
The BBNJ Agreement emphasizes the special circumstances of SIDS, and SIDS participation, including in decision-making processes. Furthermore, the BBNJ Agreement includes provisions on capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology to support developing States, such as SIDS, in benefitting from and implementing the Agreement.

Following on an initial side event at the preparatory meeting for SIDS4, this side event aims to continue to promote a better understanding of the BBNJ Agreement and its key elements, focusing on how SIDS can engage with and benefit from the BBNJ Agreement. It will discuss the unique challenges, opportunities and potential contributions of SIDS in the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. It will also contribute to the discussion on the early identification of capacity-building needs of SIDS, in their quest for a resilient and sustainable future, toward becoming party to, implementing and complying with the BBNJ Agreement, and provide information on how SIDS can benefit from the programme of technical assistance and capacity-building activities developed by DOALOS and partners in this regard. Examples of regional coordination developed to support States will be provided to support information exchange and the identification of opportunities.

Thematic focus and expected outcomes of the side event:

- Raised awareness and promotion of a better understanding of the BBNJ Agreement, in particular its relation to the priorities of SIDS.
- A forum for discussion of the challenges, opportunities and potential contributions of SIDS in the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.
- Contribution to the discussion on identification of capacity-building needs of SIDS toward becoming party to, implementing and complying with the BBNJ Agreement, and provision of information on how SIDS can benefit from the programme of technical assistance and capacity building activities developed by DOALOS and partners in this regard.

Contribution of the side event to the Fourth International Conference for SIDS:

- Resilient economies: raised awareness of the potential benefits of the BBNJ Agreement for SIDS, which may include economic diversification and building sustainable ocean-based economies.
- Environmental protection and planetary sustainability: enhanced understanding of the role of the BBNJ Agreement in the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and its resources.
- Discussion on access to finance, science, technology and innovation, and potential partnerships for SIDS in the context of the BBNJ Agreement.
**Programme:**

1. **Opening**
   - Mr. Li Junhua, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs
   - Ms. Rabab Fatima, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
   - Ms. Valentina Germani, Senior Legal Officer, Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, on behalf of Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel

2. **Overview of the BBNJ Agreement with a focus on SIDS and overview of DOALOS activities to promote a better understanding of the Agreement and prepare for its entry into force** (Mr. Fernando Cabrera Diaz, Legal Officer, DOALOS)

3. **Overview of the coordinated work being undertaken by SIDS in respect of the BBNJ Agreement** (Mr. Filimon Manoni, Pacific Ocean Commissioner, OPOC)

4. **Moderated discussions – The special circumstances, interests and needs of SIDS in the context of the BBNJ Agreement and beyond** (Moderator TBC)

   **Guiding questions:**
   - How can the BBNJ Agreement contribute to the achievement of resilient prosperity in SIDS?
   - What are the needs of SIDS toward becoming parties to, implementing and complying with the BBNJ Agreement?
   - What are the broader capacity opportunities and needs of SIDS to address their ocean governance challenges and opportunities?
   - How can collaboration amongst SIDS regions and other partners be enhanced in support of capacity-building?
   - How did the UNNF Fellowship contribute to shaping your career path, including in your role as BBNJ negotiator? Based on your own experience, what needs and opportunities could be addressed and provided through the new SIDS Fellowship?

5. **Panelists:**
   - H.E. Mr. Steven Victor, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment, Palau
   - Representative from an AIS SIDS
   - Representative from a Caribbean SIDS
   - Mr. Khalil Hassanali, Senior Research Officer (Policy), Institute of Marine Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago (UNNF Alumni)
   - Ms. Siri Bjune, Head of Global Maritime Crime Programme, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

5. **Concluding Remarks**
   - Key takeaways from the discussions
   - Next steps