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Input on the zero draft for the 2020 United Nations Ocean Conference

New York, 19 March 2020

Co-facilitators,

We align ourselves with the statements submitted by our respective groupings, namely by Guyana on behalf of the G77 and China, Belize on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, and Fiji on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States. We thank you for the zero draft, which we consider concise and action oriented. It does reflect a fair balance and representation of the issues discussed. We support it and are prepared to use it as a guide to our work.

In light of current circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 virus, we do particularly appreciate that you did not postpone or cancel the process for developing the intergovernmental outcome but rather are using the best tools at your disposal to move the process forward. We are ready to support you. We only have a few points to make in our national capacity.

Paragraph 3 talks about the importance of the Ocean, and rightly so. It does indeed have key environmental and economical roles. We also suggest to add that the Ocean forms an important part of our cultural heritage, a notion that is important for many Pacific Islanders and that informs much of our traditional knowledge about and sustainable management of the Ocean. In short, it should cover the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Paragraph 5 is of utmost importance. The IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate is factual and needs to be properly reflected. We should also be mindful of the links to the upcoming United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, which will give us tools to mitigate and adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and related phenomena.

However, the human impact on the Ocean is not confined to greenhouse gas emissions. We need to look at the cumulative impacts of all human activities, including plastic pollution and overfishing.

In paragraph 10, we would suggest to have a reference to small-scale and artisanal fishers. Indeed in many developing countries, and particularly in SIDS, they are feeding our population. In the case of Micronesia, we have closed both the territorial sea and the contiguous zone to commercial fishing, in order to protect the valuable fish stocks in our water and to reserve them for our small-scale and artisanal fishers.

Paragraph 10(e) contains a number of important elements. We do agree on harnessing the potential for renewable energy that the Ocean holds, and it needs to be reflected in the declaration. We further agree that nature-based solutions are necessary. While we are comfortable with using the term as it featured in the recent UNSG's Climate Action Summit, we understand that others are unclear about the terminology, so we are open to considering alternative phrasing as long as it retains the same idea.

Many SIDS, including Micronesia, are leading the way, using blue carbon (mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrass) to sequester carbon and establishing MPAs to protect the Ocean, making it more healthy, productive and resilient. Perhaps a way to move forward together is to be more explicit in naming the solutions?

We agree that the chapeau of paragraph 11 seems to be the most prudent place to highlight the special requirements of LDCs and SIDS. We support your choice and would like to keep the listing here short.

Finally, in paragraph 11(e), we appreciate the inclusion of language recognizing the important complementary role of the traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in relation to science. We were heartened by the amount of support in the room raising the issue in the previous round of consultations. We think the point could be further strengthened by tying it to the theme of the Conference and the partnership themes. Specifically, in addition to the current reference to "traditional knowledge" in paragraph 11(e), we could also reference the innovations and practices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as well as the need to respect, protect, and maintain such innovations, practices, and traditional knowledge, in line with Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Thank you.