

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

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**2020 UN OCEAN CONFERENCE PREPARATORY MEETING**

Date: Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2020

10:00

Place: Conference Room 4

**REMARKS BY H.E. TIJJANI MUHAMMAD-BANDE,  
PRESIDENT OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

I welcome you to today's preparatory meeting ahead of the 2<sup>nd</sup> UN Ocean Conference. Over the next two days, we will prepare for a critical moment for the health of both life under water and life on land.

I thank the Permanent Representatives of Palau and Denmark for their overview of what we hope to achieve over the next two days.

Excellencies,

Let us not forget that life under water is *essential* to life on land. The ocean produces half of the oxygen we breathe and provides food for 3.2 billion people around the world.

Furthermore, the ocean plays a fundamental role in mitigating climate change as a major heat and carbon sink.

The worldwide ocean economy's future, and the livelihoods it supports, depend on the success of the upcoming Ocean Conference.

The worldwide ocean economy is valued at around 1.5 trillion US dollars annually. Indeed, aquaculture is the fastest growing food sector, and 350 million jobs world-wide are linked to fisheries.

A healthy marine environment holds untold potential for achieving the entirety of the Sustainable Development Agenda. Yet the unsustainable use – and misuse – of ocean resources, climate change, and pollution all threaten the ability of our ocean to provide for us all.

Excellencies,

In this first year of the Decade of Action and Delivery, we must accelerate action on the SDG targets which mature this year, two thirds of which relate to the health of our environment.

2020 is the year which we must reach several targets related to SDG 14: Life Under Water. As such the Ocean Conference presents an opportunity to demonstrate progress and also to accelerate necessary actions.

This year is a moment to reframe our understanding of nature and the natural world as an accelerator for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

2020 presents clear opportunities for the mainstreaming of these previously siloed issues. A healthy planet, and a healthy ocean, unlock massive potential for the implementation of the rest of the SDGs.

Excellencies,

Life under water and life on land are symbiotic. Pollution hampers the ocean's ability to provide for people. For example, eight million tons of plastic waste enter the oceans each year. The effect on the food chain and global ecosystems cannot be underestimated.

It is crucial that we build upon the discussions of last year's UN Environment Assembly to tackle land-based pollution, and transition towards a circular economy.

The ministerial-level declaration calling for a reduction of single-use plastic products by 2030 demonstrates the multilateral commitment to forging a better world. We must emulate this leadership at the Ocean Conference to ensure that

the declaration has a transformative impact on life under water.

In terms of biodiversity, coral reefs are home to a quarter of all marine life, however half of all living coral has been lost. The loss of marine biodiversity cannot be underestimated and will have an adverse impact on global food security. Furthermore, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing further burden ecosystems.

Excellencies,

Climate action improves the health of our oceans. Sea level rise induced by climate-change poses an existential threat to us all. We look to Small Island Developing States who are tackling this crisis on the frontline.

Ensuring that our actions and strategic policies are cognisant of the climate – oceans relationship is key to safeguarding our future.

Last month I participated in the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the International Renewable Energy Agency and was encouraged by IRENA's work on ocean-based renewable energy.

Moreover, the International Maritime Organisation has introduced new fuel standards which will significantly reduce

the amount of sulphur dioxide emitted from the global shipping industry.

The UN system itself is working to reduce its carbon footprint via the 2030 'Greening the Blue' Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System. I trust that Member States to support this initiative.

Supporting a just transition to the new green economy is essential to protect our oceans and our world. When it comes to climate action and protecting life under water, all actions have an impact.

Next year marks the beginning of the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, a its call for intersectoral and interdisciplinary ocean data that is accessible and widely shared.

Excellencies,

We have the tools to avoid further destruction and safeguard our oceans for future generations.

We must accelerate the implementation of your 2017 Ocean Conference voluntary commitments, and give priority to oceans throughout our work.

Furthermore, I call on Member States to present new, more ambitious commitments during the upcoming 2020 UN Ocean Conference. We must partner with all stakeholders to

create networks to implement existing and upcoming voluntary commitments effectively, and to analyse implementation efforts thereafter.

This includes supporting states' capacities to effectively enforce international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Excellencies;

Youth have been vocal advocates for the urgent need for climate action and ocean protection. We need to channel their energy towards implementing transformative actions on SDG 14. This includes by raising public awareness and youth-led implementation efforts in the run up to the Conference.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> UN Ocean Conference allows us to reflect upon progress made and determine the best path forward. This preparatory meeting will determine the themes of the eight interactive dialogues of the Conference; and will catalyse discussions on the substance of the political declaration.

The time for action is now. I trust that you, the Member States, will give high priority to ocean issues and ensure a high level of participation at the Ocean Conference. This meeting needs to mobilise all peoples and resources towards safeguarding our oceans and in turn, creating a better world for all.

I trust that you will conduct negotiations in a constructive manner aimed towards a concise, action-orientated intergovernmental declaration. My team and I stand ready to support you throughout this process.

I am confident that by striving together, we will deliver on SDG 14. I thank you.

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