

THE OCEAN CONFERENCE: OUR OCEANS, OUR FUTURE: PARTNERING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG 14: 5-9 JUNE 2017

The high-level UN Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development) begins Monday, 5 June, at UN Headquarters in New York and will continue until Friday, 9 June, co-hosted by the Governments of Fiji and Sweden. The Ocean Conference aims to: identify ways and means to support the implementation of SDG 14; build on existing successful partnerships and stimulate innovative and concrete new partnerships to advance the implementation of SDG 14; involve all relevant stakeholders; share experiences gained at the national, regional and international levels in the implementation of SDG 14; and contribute to the follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) by providing an input to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). It will comprise plenary meetings, partnership dialogues and a special event on 8 June, commemorating World Oceans Day.

Partnership dialogues will focus on: addressing marine pollution; managing, protecting, conserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems; minimizing and addressing ocean acidification; making fisheries sustainable; increasing economic benefits to small island developing states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs) and providing access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets; increasing scientific knowledge, and developing research capacity and transfer of marine technology; and enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The outcomes will include an intergovernmentally agreed “Call for Action” to support the implementation of SDG 14, a report containing the Co-Chairs’ summaries of the partnership dialogues, and a list of voluntary commitments to be announced at the conference. The voluntary commitments are initiatives voluntarily undertaken by governments, the UN system, other intergovernmental organizations, international and regional financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations, academic and research institutions, the scientific

community, the private sector, philanthropic organizations and other actors, which aim to contribute to the implementation of SDG 14. To date, 684 voluntary commitments have been received.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE OCEAN CONFERENCE

In September 2015, Heads of State and Government adopted “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” including the 17 SDGs. SDG 14 contains ten targets, addressing: marine pollution; marine and coastal ecosystems; ocean acidification; overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and destructive fishing practices; conservation; harmful fisheries subsidies; economic benefits for SIDS and LDCs; and, as means of implementation, increasing scientific knowledge, providing access to resources and markets for small-scale artisanal fishers, and implementing international law, among others.

In December 2015, the UN General Assembly decided to convene a high-level UN conference to support the implementation of SDG 14 in Fiji (resolution 70/226). The venue was reconsidered due to the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Winston, which struck Fiji in February 2016. In September 2016, the General Assembly decided to hold the conference at the UN Headquarters in New York, co-hosted by Fiji and Sweden (resolution 70/303). By the same resolution, the General Assembly agreed on the outcomes and structure of the conference; requested the President to convene a two-day preparatory meeting in February 2017; and requested the UN Secretary-General to prepare a background note ahead of the preparatory meeting, including a proposal of themes for the partnership dialogues to convene during the Ocean Conference.

In October 2016, Peter Thomson, President of the General Assembly, appointed two co-facilitators to oversee the preparatory process and to conclude intergovernmental consultations on a “Call for Action”: Álvaro Mendonça e Moura, Permanent Representative of Portugal to the UN, and Burhan Gafoor, Permanent Representative of Singapore to the UN.

PREPARATORY MEETING: The Preparatory Meeting for the Ocean Conference was held from 15-16 February 2017, at the UN Headquarters in New York. The meeting discussed the themes for the partnership dialogues, and held an exchange of views on elements for the Call for Action. UN Member States noted the importance of a concise, action-oriented declaration, which is easy for the public to understand and captures a common vision for action on SDG 14.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONSULTATIONS: The zero draft of the Call for Action was issued by the co-facilitators on 10 March 2017, and it was followed by the first round of consultations from 20-22 March. Member States exchanged views on the zero draft, and generally favored it as an accurate reflection of the discussions that took place during the preparatory meeting. Discussions addressed, among others, references to: climate change issues; means of implementation of ocean-related targets, including reference to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda; UNCLOS; and World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations on fisheries subsidies.

Following circulation of a revised zero draft on 10 April, the second round of consultations convened on 24-25 and 27 April. Main areas of disagreement included references to: the negotiations on marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction (BBNJ); UNCLOS; and the WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies. Governments also discussed the process for the follow-up and review of SDG 14; and debated references to “blue economy,” plastics and microplastics, CBDR, and specific groups of countries in relation to means of implementation.

The second revised draft of the Call for Action was circulated on 9 May, and the third round of consultations was held on 22-23 and 25 May. Following extensive discussion, Member States reached agreement on the Call for Action, including on: recognizing the “particular importance” of the Paris Agreement on climate change; referring to the principles reaffirmed in the 2030 Agenda, rather than explicitly referencing CBDR; recognizing the special importance of SDG 14 targets for SIDS and LDCs, but also acknowledging challenges for landlocked developing countries, African states including coastal ones and many middle-income countries; noting that UNCLOS “provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources”; the need to accelerate work to complete WTO negotiations on harmful fisheries subsidies; and enhancing inter-agency coordination and coherence throughout the UN system on ocean issues, taking into consideration the work of UN-Oceans. The US noted its intention to dissociate itself from the agreed text on the WTO negotiations, adding it will make known its position on this, and possibly other paragraphs, at the time of the conference.

RELATED EVENTS

HIGH-LEVEL SDG ACTION EVENT: CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: Convened by General Assembly’s President Peter Thomson in collaboration with the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), this event was held from 23-24 March 2017, at UN Headquarters in New York. The event sought to provide an opportunity to highlight synergies between actions to address climate change and the 2030 Agenda. Representatives of Member States, international organizations, the private sector and civil society discussed their efforts to advance solutions to implement the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

BBNJ PREPCOM-3: In its resolution 69/292, the General Assembly decided to develop an international legally binding instrument (ILBI) under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of BBNJ. To that end, the Assembly established a Preparatory Committee (PrepCom), to make substantive recommendations to the General Assembly on the elements of a draft text of an ILBI, taking into account the various reports of the Co-Chairs of a working group, which met nine times between 2006-2015; and for the Assembly to decide at its seventy-second session, which begins in September 2017, whether to convene an intergovernmental conference to elaborate the text of the agreement. The PrepCom began its work in March 2016.

The third session of the PrepCom took place from 27 March-7 April 2017, at UN Headquarters in New York. Delegates met in plenary and in informal working groups to consider: marine genetic resources (MGRs), including questions on benefit-sharing; measures such as area-based management tools, including marine protected areas (MPAs); environmental impact assessments (EIAs); capacity building and marine technology transfer; and cross-cutting issues, such as the scope of an ILBI, its relationship with other instruments, and its institutional arrangements.

SECOND ANNUAL STI FORUM: The second meeting of the Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum) was held from 15-16 May 2017, at UN Headquarters in New York. The STI Forum is a component of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism outlined in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the 2030 Agenda. The theme for this year’s meeting was “Science, Technology and Innovation for a Changing World – Focus on SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, and 14.” Cross-cutting sessions addressed, among other issues: key priorities for engaging STI for ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (SDG 1); key priorities for engaging STI to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture (SDG 2); key priorities for engaging STI for conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (SDG 14); lessons learned in improving the impact of STI on the SDGs – highlighting the cross-cutting nature of STI; STI capacity building for achieving the SDGs; and supporting the implementation of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism. In addition, the STI Forum featured a series of 90-second innovation pitches for the sharing of innovations that provide solutions targeting these six SDGs. Innovators from around the world were invited to submit their scientific and technological solutions to the challenges posed by the six SDGs and 12 were selected.

ICP-18: The 18th meeting of the UN Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea convened from 15-19 May 2017, at UN Headquarters in New York. With a focus on “The effects of climate change on oceans,” the meeting’s two main segments addressed: the effects of climate change on oceans, including environmental, social and economic implications; and cooperation and coordination in addressing the effects of climate change on oceans – current actions and opportunities for further enhancement. On future work, the Co-Chairs’ summary reflects discussions on ways to address the links between climate change and oceans, including through the HLPF and the SDGs.