

## UN Ocean Conference Highlights: Monday, 27 June 2022

On Monday, the second UN Ocean Conference opened in Lisbon, Portugal. Delegates met in plenary in the morning, and in an interactive dialogue on marine pollution in the afternoon.

### Opening and election of co-presidents

Welcoming delegates, Carlos Moedas, Mayor of Lisbon, invited delegations to be inspired by the city's Tower of Belém, calling on delegates to use this Conference to mark the end of ocean degradation and the beginning of ocean preservation and set the world on a sustainable ocean trajectory.

UN Secretary General António Guterres opened the Conference. Delegates elected, by acclamation, President Uhuru Kenyatta, Kenya, and President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, Portugal, to serve as the Conference co-presidents.

In his opening remarks, President de Sousa, underlined that the Conference is being held at the right time, in the right place and through the right approach, underscoring the centrality of the ocean to peace and security, health, environmental resilience, and sustainable development.

Lamenting that the global goal on the ocean is the least financed sustainable development goal (SDG), President Kenyatta urged delegates to shift gears from ideas to action, driven by science and innovation, and called for examples of nature-based solutions linking the ocean and climate change, as well as financing solutions for the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean.

UN Secretary-General Guterres offered four recommendations for addressing the ocean emergency: invest in sustainable ocean economies for food and renewable energy; use the ocean as a model for how to manage global problems for the greater good; protect the ocean and people whose lives and livelihoods depend on them; and invest in an early warning system to protect coastal communities. He said the Conference can open a new horizon for a just and sustainable future for all, making a difference for the ocean and for ourselves.

Abdulla Shahid, President of the General Assembly, said there is no context where we live on the planet without the ocean and highlighted the increasing contribution of women scientists and the passion and commitment that youth bring to this work.

Collen Vixen Kelapile, President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), highlighted the timing of the conference as an opportunity to provide essential inputs to the second in-depth review of SDG 14 (conserve and sustainably use the ocean, seas and marine resources) at the upcoming 2022 High-level Political Forum.

Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and Conference Secretary-General, focused on the importance of science and innovation and opportunities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic recovery.

### Organizational Matters

Delegates adopted the conference's rules of procedure, agenda and organization of work (A/CONF.230/1-3); elected as Vice-

Presidents: Angola and Mozambique, for Africa; Iran, Singapore and Sri Lanka for Asia and the Pacific; Estonia, Latvia and Poland for Central and Eastern Europe; Chile, Dominican Republic and Peru for Latin America and the Caribbean; and Iceland and Malta for the Western Europe and Others Group; and elected Maria de Jesus dos Reis Ferreira (Angola) as the conference's Rapporteur. The conference also established a credentials committee and appointed co-chairs for the eight Interactive Dialogues to be held throughout the week.

### General Debate

President João Lourenço, Angola, stressed the need for solutions to reverse current trends of ocean pollution and unregulated exploitation of marine resources, and shared his country's actions to guard against unregulated commercial fishing. He also highlighted the actions of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries, including cooperation under the Namibe Declaration to promote sustainable fisheries.

President Surangel Whipps, Palau, speaking also for the Pacific Small Island States (PSIDS), highlighted the region's support for the intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) working on an international legally binding instrument (ILBI) to end plastic pollution, and supported a new agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). He announced his country's commitment to generate 100% renewable energy by 2032.

President Iván Duque, Colombia, shared his country's commitment to reduce carbon emissions by 50% by 2030; conserve and protect 30% of its marine areas; restore one million hectares of coral reef areas; implement a blue carbon program to protect mangroves; and establish a joint marine protected area (MPA) with other countries.

Chairman of the Presidential Council, Mohamed Younis Ahmed Al-Manfi, Libya, said security issues are exacerbating ecosystem damages to his country. President Umaro Sissoco Embaló, Guinea Bissau, emphasized his country's vulnerability to climate change and said the greatest hope for protecting the ocean resides in the youth and growing environmental awareness.

President Nana Akufo-Addo, Ghana, highlighted Ghana's role in co-convening the Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution, and urged countries to ratify the Cape Town Agreement for the Safety of Fishing Vessels to protect sea farers. President Teodoro Obiang Mbasogo, Equatorial Guinea, highlighted plans for new waste treatment facilities to stop dumping of plastic in the ocean.

Vice President Philip Mpango, Tanzania, highlighted his country's commitments in sustainable ocean development — particularly to fight illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU)— such as the establishment of science and innovation partnerships, marine protected areas and modernizing fisheries.

Frank Bainimarama, Prime Minister, Fiji, on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum, reminded that SDG 14 is by far the least funded of the SDGs, and stressed that the rights of small island state's maritime zones will not be lost when land disappears due to sea-level rise.

António Costa, Prime Minister, Portugal, spoke about developments in ocean sustainability, such as ensuring that 100% of maritime areas under Portugal's jurisdiction will be environmentally sound, recognizing the link between science and the ocean, and developing a bioeconomy strategy.

Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister, Iceland, highlighted the value of oceans and marine resources in bringing solutions to current crises and feeding the population. She announced that Iceland has joined the high ambition coalition on BBNJ.

### *Interactive Dialogue*

**Addressing Marine Pollution:** This dialogue was co-chaired by David Parker, Minister for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, New Zealand, and Flavien Joubert, Minister for Environment, Energy and Climate Change, Seychelles.

Co-Chair Joubert opened the dialogue and introduced the concept paper (A/CONF.230/2022/9). He called for cooperation to achieve substantive results to achieve SDG 14, and welcomed the focus on a new treaty to end plastic pollution.

Co-Chair Parker called on all countries involved in the negotiation of a new plastic pollution treaty to aim for a high ambition agreement, noting the need for strong multistakeholder engagement and financing.

Charles Goddard, Economist Group, Hong Kong, moderated the event. He noted that ending plastic pollution in the marine environment has seized the global imagination, but marine pollution takes many other forms.

Kitack Lim, Secretary-General, International Maritime Organization (IMO), pointed to the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments as the IMO's action to combat marine litter from ships. He drew attention to the IMO's agreement on mandatory goal-based measures for the marking of fishing gear.

Susan Gardener, Director, Ecosystems Division, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), highlighted the multiple processes and resolutions addressing the triple planetary threat of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, in particular resolution 5/14 to end plastic pollution.

Janis Searles Jones, Chief Executive Officer, Ocean Conservancy, focused on the interlinkages between the ocean and other issues, including climate change. She said that "life below water is critical to conserve life above water," stressing that we cannot have one without the other.

Alexander Turra, Coordinator of the UNESCO Chair on Ocean Sustainability, said that change requires science, education, and action to foster governance and addresses poverty.

Andrea Meza Murillo, Deputy Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification, said we need to create a "Paris moment" for marine pollution and address the fossil fuel industry's contribution to plastic production.

Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, CEO and Chairperson, Global Environment Facility (GEF), said it is our moral imperative to accelerate action and that the GEF is working with companies to support full lifecycle production approaches to help address marine pollution.

During the ensuing discussion, delegations shared their priorities and actions to address marine pollution.

Tonga, for the PSIDS, welcomed the establishment of an INC towards ending plastic pollution, calling for more ambitious action to cover the full lifecycle of plastics, including the production of virgin plastic.

Fiji, for the PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM, welcomed the UN Environment Assembly's resolution to end plastic pollution, and condemned the dumping of radioactive nuclear waste, urging Japan not to dump nuclear wastewater into the Pacific.

Antigua and Barbuda, for the ALLIANCE OF SMALL ISLAND STATES (AOSIS), called on states to sign the recently launched Declaration for the Enhancement of Marine Scientific Knowledge, Research Capacity and Transfer of Marine Technology to SIDS.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES noted the lack of youth representatives in the room and shared insights and actions focused on reducing plastic pollution, including a platform where marine litter elimination solutions are shared. MALDIVES stressed their people's complete dependence on the marine ecosystems, shared a range of measures Maldives has implemented, and called for more global action.

The OECD shared results from a recently released report which provides science-based insights on plastic pollution towards 2060.

NORWAY stressed that the mandate of the ILBI to end plastic pollution is strictly defined so there is no need to restart discussions on the topic. URUGUAY shared various policy initiatives in their country and noted that "the problem is not plastic, but what we do with it."

CURAÇAO called for donations to address the catastrophic risks of an imminent spill of the oil storage platform Safer on the coast of the Red Sea. LATVIA highlighted the importance of international cooperation to address transboundary pollution, including for the heavily-polluted Baltic Sea.

THE REGULAR PROCESS FOR GLOBAL REPORTING AND ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING SOCIOECONOMIC ASPECTS said the scale of impacts from novel chemicals in the ocean is unknown, and encouraged broad participation in the upcoming third cycle of the Process.

BAHRAIN shared that the country is moving away from single-use plastics and focusing on mangroves and sea grass as nature-based solutions for marine pollution.

AUSTRALIA outlined several commitments, including one to ban waste exports; have 100% of packaging be reusable, recyclable, or compostable by 2025; and invest USD 16 million to support the Pacific Regional Action Plan: Marine Litter: 2018-2025.

JAPAN underlined their voluntary actions with other countries under the 2019 Osaka Blue Ocean Vision, which aims to reduce marine plastic litter to zero by 2050.

YOUNG ENVIRONMENTALIST PROGRAMME TRUST and OCEAN SCHOOL INDIA stressed the need for strengthened ocean literacy as well as the enforcement of compulsory ocean curricula, underscoring that most ocean pollution starts from "our back yards."

ECUADOR called for a fundamental shift in production and consumption patterns to address the underlying causes of pollution.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC highlighted the "blue flag" assessments of compliance with SDG 14, which is a civil society tool to monitor progress.

KENYA shared the country's 2017 plastic carrier bag ban and the 2019 prohibition of single-use plastics in all protected areas.

DEVELOPMENT BANK OF LATIN AMERICA announced a voluntary commitment of USD 1.2 billion to support projects to benefit the ocean in the region.

SLOVAKIA noted that a recently launched deposit-refund scheme has yielded 1 million packages collected daily from a population of 5 million people.

The Co-Chairs called on delegations to submit their statements to the Secretariat, expressing hope that ILBI should be an easy win for governments, and that the world can still move towards a sustainable future for the ocean.

### *In the Corridors*

After a long wait, during which the crises affecting the ocean have only grown, many delegates were eager to share ideas on how to solve the most pressing challenges, while others limited themselves to repeating well-known keywords. Top on the list was marine pollution, at least 85% of which is plastic waste. In a curious twist, delegations received a PET bottle as part of their conference pack. "They are labeled recyclable," offered one delegate, "but aren't all PET bottles recyclable?" Another wondered if this was an "ironic joke" or a "terrible mistake," with one seasoned observer turning the bottle over to see whether there was a hidden message inside.