



MALDIVES

Statement by:

H.E Mr Ahmed Sareer, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Maldives to the United Nations
Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals
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Distinguished Co-Chairs

My delegation is grateful to you for convening this 8th session of the Open Work Group on Sustainable Development Goals on "Oceans and seas, forests & biodiversity". I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the Keynote speakers and panelists for the inputs and inspiring remarks, as well as the UN's Technical Support Team for their informative issue briefs.

Co-Chairs,

In the Maldives, mangroves frame the boundary between land and sea. They provide protection from flood, erosion, sequester carbon and provide a nursery habitat for our fisheries. Yet, the true forests of Maldives are our coral reefs, providing the physical foundation and structure of our marine environment. This is also where our wealth of biodiversity lies: below the waves.

For my delegation, all topics of the 8th session constitute what the Maldives is. For us, sustainable development of the Oceans encompasses not only the environmental pillar but also an economic priority. Our economy to a large extent depends on our marine ecosystems and biodiversity. Any adverse impact on our marine living resources and our marine habitat directly damages our livelihood. Oceans also have an important social and cultural element, as the development of our nation and my people's sustenance have been intertwined with the Ocean since time immemorial.

It is for these reasons, the Maldives joins others who call for the need of a stand-alone Goal on Oceans in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Let me be more specific. Let me outline why Oceans are an indivisible and integral part of Sustainable Development, not only for the Maldives and other Small Island Developing States, but universally, and what we think an Oceans SDG should entail.

Co-Chairs,

During the past seven sessions of the Open Working Groups, we have heard discussions on the centrality of poverty eradication in our approach towards SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda. Biodiversity and natural resources are the capital of the poor. Small-scale fisheries employ more than 90 percent of the world's fishermen, contributing significantly to poverty alleviation. Providing access to markets, capacity building, better governance and the reduction of other pressures on fish stocks hold the potential to greatly increase this contribution.

Sustainable fisheries provide a vital contribution to food security and healthy nutrition, especially for the poor. Fisheries provide 4.3 billion people with about 15% of their intake of animal protein, especially in developing countries. They represent a source for micro-nutrients, which are often missing in the diet of the world's poorest.

Co-Chairs,

The provision of decent work and reduction of unemployment is another aim of a Sustainable Development Agenda that many have emphasized during the discussions in the Open Working Group. A Report by the Convention on Biological Diversity estimates that over 3 billion people worldwide depend on coastal and marine resources for their livelihood. An FAO study suggests that the livelihoods of 660–820 million people, which are about 10–12 percent of the world's population, rely on these 2 sectors alone. UNESCO estimates that the global oceans-based economy is worth between 3 to 6 trillion USD/ year.

Achieving sustainable development of an ocean-based economy promises not only potential to provide additional employment but can also contribute to sustained economic growth. Emerging and reformed economic sectors such as offshore renewable energy, the environmentally conscious extraction of living and non-living seabed resources, the fair and equitable use and sharing of genetic marine resources and the transition to more sustainable shipping, fishing and tourism industries have considerable economic potential.

Co-Chairs,

Despite sustainable fisheries being the archetype of sustainable consumption and protection, we have seldom implemented effective measures to achieve this while failing to provide decent work, food security and nutrition indefinitely. According to FAO, even the most conservative estimates show that over 30% of the World's fish stocks are overexploited and another 50% are fully exploited. Many other fish stocks are data deficient but are still being fished. A report by the World Bank concludes that we are losing 50 Billion USD a year due to overfishing and poor fisheries management. According to the same report, subsidies in some countries to maintain large long-distance fishing fleets contribute to the problems of overcapacity, overfishing and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUU). These subsidies are not only environmentally unsustainable and morally questionable; they are also economically unprofitable.

Many developing countries do not retain a big share of the benefits of their own fisheries because the domestic value chain is often short, and processing and sale take place in other countries. We have to make sure that countries with large Ocean territories reap the benefits and profit from their own fisheries to the maximum effect. Targets in this regard could be the restoration of a certain share of fish stocks to their maximum sustainable yield, phasing out of subsidies that lead to overfishing, and maintaining a larger share of economic benefits in the countries in which territory the fish are caught.

Co-Chairs,

Like overfishing, other threats further endanger the marine environment and the livelihoods connected to it. Many of them are externalities of unsustainable Consumption and Production patterns. Anthropogenic CO² emission, causing both Climate Change and Ocean Acidification which represent catastrophic dangers to our oceans economy let alone our national territory. Loss of biodiversity due to various pressures decreases the resilience of the Ocean, as do transboundary pollutants, such as marine debris, especially plastic.

These are shared threats, that no country can address alone, but so are the benefits we as a community of nations can reap from the Oceans. Oceans have to be managed globally, that is why we attach so much importance to this current debate.

As we demonstrate here, a sustainable development goal on Oceans is ideally suited to incorporate many of the topics that have so far been discussed in the Open Working Group, especially those that have been emphasized as cross-cutting. We have mentioned Climate Change, Ocean Acidification, Biodiversity and Sustainable Consumption and Production. Mangroves are another example of a cross-cutting element for

Oceans, forests, biodiversity and disaster risk reduction. They provide protection from coastal erosion and buffer against extreme events, harbor fish nurseries and fulfil other important ecosystem functions. Water and Sanitation, Sustainable Transport and Sustainable Energy are further topics that are inevitably linked to Oceans.

To achieve Sustainable Development in general we would also need to consider the Means of Implementation. This should never be left out. The protection and sustainable use of marine resources require scientific expertise, the collection of data, and good monitoring systems, as observed in the very helpful UN statistical note on the topic. SIDS have been the custodian of the Oceans and could fulfil this role even better with improved capacity and technology transfer in this regard.

Co-Chairs,

In conclusion, we believe a stand-alone goal on Oceans and Seas offers the best approach to capture the myriad of the vital contributions of Oceans to all three pillars of Sustainable Development. It should aim to maximize the economic value of ocean economies. It should make sure that no synergies are lost in the underlying aim to eradicate poverty, provide food security and ensure decent work for all. It should further aim to ensure that these contributions are long-term, by removing the biggest stresses that threaten the Ocean, namely marine pollution and debris, overfishing, and climate change. Last but not least, it should make sure that all countries have the means, including capacity and technology, to enable them to effectively implement and monitor the necessary measures.

The Maldives envisions long term solutions which are holistic and acknowledge the fundamental importance of oceans. We are whole heartedly committed to working closely with the international community to ensure this vision comes to fruition.

Thank you, Co-Chair.