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Preparatory meeting for the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Discussion on the Call for action

**Statement by H.E. Jane Chigiyal
Permanent Representative
On behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum**

New York, 16 February 2017

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Co-facilitators,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum members. We agree with you that the “Call for Action” should be concise and action oriented and not a restatement of previously agreed language. We trust that you will strike the right balance in crafting the zero draft. We are committed to constructively engage in that spirit to help you.

The First World Ocean Assessment paints a bleak picture on the state of our oceans. We look forward to the technical summary to be released in April, which will inform our discussions at the Conference on how the implementation of SDG 14 will bring our oceans back on track so that it can be conserved and sustainably used for the benefit of all.

We are mindful of the importance that the Ocean plays for all nations, particularly Small Island Developing States as being one of the few resources available to them. The Pacific Ocean is pivotal for our food security and our sustainable development and it needs to be better protected, preserved and sustainably used for the long-term benefit of humanity and the ecosystem.

Our Forum leaders at their Summit last September in their Pohnpei Oceans Statement reiterated that the Ocean is the most important natural resource for the Pacific region. It is for this reason that the countries of the Pacific Islands Forum, under the auspices of the Framework for Pacific Oceanscape have shown leadership and commitment for an integrated ocean management. However, the burden of conserving the Oceans resources must not disproportionately fall on them, all stakeholders must play their part.

Co-Facilitators,

The economic benefit to coastal states, particularly SIDS derived from their own Ocean and its resources including fisheries, aquaculture and tourism needs to increase in order to support their sustainable development aspirations under the auspices of the 2030 Agenda. Therefore, urgent concerted and sustained action is required in the following fields:

Fisheries must be managed sustainably. Enhanced sustainable fisheries management is pivotal and renewed commitment for concrete actions from all stakeholders – government, industry players, coastal communities and civil society - is needed. We must ensure that all fisheries are managed sustainably.

We must eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and its associated activities by effectively addressing the root causes that give rise to IUU fishing and hold parties accountable. This includes addressing harmful subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. We therefore also support the acceleration of negotiations in the WTO to strengthen disciplines on subsidies in the fisheries sector, including prohibitions on subsidies for IUU fishing, which would help combat this harmful practice and protect the ocean resources. High seas bunkering, human trafficking and illicit trade also needs to be addressed. Flag states must exercise more diligent efforts in carrying out their flag state responsibilities and control of nationals.

We also see merit to have all fish traceable from where it is caught to where it ends up on the table as an important measure to end IUU fishing. Transparency is a powerful deterrent. We must eliminate harmful as well as destructive fishing practices. For our part, the Pacific Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Fisheries guides our cooperative and constructive work on this front.

Our region has seen successful partnerships between countries in jointly enforcing our Exclusive Economic Zones and in combating IUU fishing on the high seas. The use of modern information and communication and technology tools for monitoring control and surveillance including satellite tracking has also proven important. Nowadays it is possible not only to locate and identify a ship but also to see what activity it is engaged in. Rather than looking for a needle in the haystack, one can target suspicious vessels and have a higher rate of success. We therefore urge for the transfer of affordable and appropriate marine technology that could enhance national and regional capacity including marine data collation, analysis and application to protect, conserve and sustainably use the oceans and seas.

We must protect and preserve the coastal and marine environment. The Ocean is suffering from many stressors. CO2 emissions are causing ocean acidification and a warming climate is heating our Ocean. Implementing the Paris Agreement is a vital necessity to stop the vicious cycle in order to protect our coral reefs and ultimately our islands. Coral ecosystems play an important role in climate change mitigation and adaptation. They are also a significant source of economic growth due to their positive impacts for fisheries, aquaculture and tourism. Protecting them is important not just environmentally, but for the economic livelihoods of many throughout the Pacific.

We must prevent marine debris, litter, microplastics, toxic material from shipwrecks and land sources, and abandoned ghost fishing gear from entering the Ocean. However, this will not be enough. Technology exists today to start the cleanup which is overdue.

We must invest in our Ocean. In particular we need investments in science and research in order to better understand the capacity of our Ocean to provide for our future, including the need to understand and build resilience against ocean acidification. We will also need capacity building and the transfer of appropriate, modern and environmentally sound technology. Partnerships are the key to unlocking the knowledge and the finances needed to meet the SDG14 targets. We need to bring others along if we want to achieve success: government, international institutions, non-governmental organisations, civil society, academia, the scientific community and the private sector.

We must keep the momentum going. Over the last years we have seen a sharper focus on the sustainable development of the Ocean by the international community. We are encouraged by the progress towards a legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on BBNJ. In addition, Rio+20, the SAMOA Pathway and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have been milestones in addressing Oceans issues. The Ocean Conference will start the next chapter, namely to start implementation. It should not be the final one. We think it will be important to assess the progress which the Call for Action has achieved in three years at the next Conference.

I thank you.