



*Office of the President*

**Statement by His Excellency the Honourable Baron Waqa M.P.,  
President of the Republic of Nauru  
United Nations Oceans Conference  
Plenary Meeting General Debate  
5 – 9 June, 2017**

Their Excellencies the Co-Presidents of the United Nations Ocean Conference

Mr. Secretary General of the United Nations

Mr. President of the General Assembly

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

At the outset, let me offer heartfelt congratulations to the Co-Presidents of the United Nations Ocean Conference, His Excellency Prime Minister Bainimarama of Fiji and Her Excellency Deputy Prime Minister Isabella Lovin of Sweden. My Delegation conveys its appreciation for your commitment and dedication in ensuring the convening of the first ever United Nations global conference on Ocean.

Co-Presidents,

In a small Pacific Island Country, there are fewer pathways to sustainable development. We do not have a large labor force or abundant natural resources that appeal to private investors. Nor do we enjoy strategic access to major markets or fast internet connectivity that might spawn a generation of entrepreneurs. Lacking these things, we struggle even to mobilize the resources necessary for basic education and health care. This is why Small Island Developing States are recognized in numerous international agreements as a special case for sustainable development.

However, we do have one important pathway to sustainable development, and that is the Ocean.

The Pacific Small Island Developing States are the stewards of the largest Ocean. I would like to tell you what that means to my country, the Republic of Nauru, including both the opportunities and the challenges.

With a population of just over 10,000 people, we are the smallest member of the United Nations. The landmass of our single island is only 21 square kilometers. However, the expanse of water within our EEZ is over *fifteen thousand* times larger.

In other words, 99.99% of Nauru is ocean.

As you can imagine, much of our daily lives and livelihoods center around the Ocean. I do not know a single Nauruan man who doesn't count fishing among his favorite pastimes. For many families, it is also a primary means of subsistence.

Our Ocean has also made our tiny Republic a global economic player. Some countries have oil. Others have timber or strategic minerals. We have tuna.

Globally, tuna fishing contributes over 42 billion dollars to the global economy, and the stocks of the Pacific Ocean are by far and away the most valuable. Fleets from the other side of the globe enter our waters to harvest the region's most precious resource.

Unchecked, these foreign vessels would have quickly decimated our tuna stocks, but Nauru, along with seven of our (not much larger) neighbors took proactive measures to sustainably manage our tuna and protect this critical source of revenue for our countries. The Parties to the Nauru Agreement, or PNA, has achieved among the highest standards for tuna sustainability in the world. Eight small countries cooperated to improve the regulation of a massive global industry.

The PNA has been an overwhelming success, but it has not removed all the threats to a sustainable tuna industry in the region. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing is the most problematic, especially for a country as small as ours. IUU fishing is a criminal act, akin to piracy, and must be addressed with urgency. Not only does IUU fishing threaten the marine environment, but it also enables other serious criminal elements, such as human and drug traffickers.

It is simply impossible for Nauru alone to police the 300,000 square kilometers of our EEZ. We do not have the people, the boats, or the technology. What we need is international cooperation, particularly with surveillance and the capacity to apprehend IUU boats.

It is also imperative that we improve tuna traceability and transparency of the tuna supply chain. Nauru has signed on to the Tuna 2020 Traceability Declaration supporting

industry pledges to ensure that all tuna products in their supply chains will be fully traceable.

We thank the international community for recognizing May 2<sup>nd</sup> as a World Tuna Day and we will continue to recognize the importance for a sustainable tuna stock and healthy ocean.

Nauru has pledged to hold a national week for ocean awareness and clean-up campaign. We commit to establishing a Marine Pollution Plan of Action that will address waste management and includes marine pollution prevention activities. However, we will continue to aspire to do more but we need key partnerships to tackle plastic pollution and improve ocean literacy that will empower our citizens to act.

Lastly, we look forward to [a successful outcome] to negotiations on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, which is another critical piece of our effort to preserve Ocean's enormous benefits for present and future generations.

Co-Presidents,

It is the lack of economic opportunity and the notion of the tragedy of the commons that often drives IUU fishing. Greater life opportunities will decrease the incentive for people to engage in illegal and harmful acts. That is why the full implementation of all the sustainable development goals is so important. The SDGs are all interlinked and cannot be achieved in isolation. Though focused on Oceans, this Conference should connect and demystify all SDGs.

We gather here at a time when the efficacy of multilateralism is being questioned. For too long, the global economic system has not delivered for too many, and as a result, some are starting to reject international institutions and turn inward. This conference comes at a precarious moment in human history, and we know full well that the challenges we face – with our Oceans, with our climate, and with our development – cannot be overcome alone.

The SDGs were designed to be universal, so that no country and no community is left behind. This Conference must demonstrate that we remain true to this ideal. The smallest member of the United Nations, along with seven of our Pacific Island neighbors, were able to transform the governance of tuna fisheries that span the largest body of water on the planet. Now, let us find out what can be achieved when 193 countries work together.

Thank you.