

# GHANA



PERMANENT MISSION OF GHANA  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
19 EAST 47TH STREET  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017  
TEL. 212-832-1300 • FAX 212-751-6743



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**STATEMENT BY**

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA,**

**HIS EXCELLENCY NANA ADDO DANKWA AKUFO-ADDO,**

**AT THE UNITED NATIONS OCEANS**

**CONFERENCE TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION**

**OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 14, IN NEW YORK,**

**USA, ON THURSDAY, 8<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2017**

I congratulate warmly the Governments of Fiji and Sweden for presiding over this important high-level Conference, aimed at supporting the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

I express Ghana's strong appreciation to His Excellency Peter Thompson, President of the General Assembly, for his leadership, vision and advocacy of the Oceans Conference, the first of its kind in history. My government acknowledges, with thanks, the enormous amount of work undertaken by Member States and other stakeholders, in preparing towards this Conference and in negotiating the "Call for Action", which will be adopted at the end of our deliberations.

Since this is my first time of addressing the United Nations as President of the Republic of Ghana, I want to congratulate Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on his well-deserved election, and for the able manner in which he has steered the affairs of the Organization since he assumed office in January this year. I am grateful for the confidence he has reposed in Ghana's leaders, in enabling me to succeed my predecessor, His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, as Co-Chair of the SDG Advocacy Group, to mobilise political support for the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Ghanaian people are honoured by his trust. Further, I want also to congratulate the redoubtable Fulani woman from the mighty Federal Republic of Nigeria, Ms Amina Mohammed, on her appointment as Deputy Secretary General of the Organisation in January. Ghana is confident that she will discharge the responsibilities of her office, including her role in seeing to the implementation of the SDGs, with distinction. We wish both of them God's blessings in the performance of their important functions.

Excellencies,

The health of our planet and our peoples is inextricably linked to the health of our oceans. Oceans cover more than 70 per cent of Earth's surface, and account for the very origins of life, as we know it. The world's oceans provide food and sustenance, mineral resources, energy, employment and livelihoods, transport and recreation. The wealth of resources, that oceans provide, forms an important part of the common heritage of mankind, and we owe it to ourselves and to succeeding generations to conserve this natural heritage. My government, therefore, welcomes the convening of this Conference, which is the first to focus on the implementation of one specific SDG. Indeed, our success, in dealing with this singularly critical and fundamental SDG Goal, will serve as a standard, and will have a positive impact on the implementation of the other linked SDG Goals and Targets. Tackling SDG 14 cannot be done in isolation, but must involve the broader objectives of sustainable management of resources and environmentally sound economic development.

For this reason, efforts to address the challenges of marine pollution and to enhance the management, protection, conservation and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems are of extreme importance to Ghana. Ghana's marine environment encompasses some 550 kilometers of coastline on the Gulf of Guinea, extending to about 200 nautical miles seaward and making up a total Exclusive Zone area of over 218,000 square kilometers. The marine area has important resources, including fisheries, oil and gas reserves, precious minerals, and is an important global reservoir of marine biodiversity, providing important migration and nesting habitats for several marine species. Ghana has a beautiful coastline with some 90 lagoons, including six internationally important wetlands. We have designated 5 of our coastal wetlands that support internationally

important populations of 12 species of migratory waterbirds, as well as 3 species of globally threatened marine turtles, as Ramsar sites.

Our beautiful coastal wetlands, however, are threatened by high volumes of plastic and metal waste that choke breeding habitats for fish, birds and other wildlife, which have an adverse impact on tourism. With respect to the Ocean Health Index, Ghana has performed above the global average in the areas of carbon storage, coastal protection, coastal livelihoods and economies, biodiversity and food provision. However, we lag behind the global average in five areas, including tourism and recreation and clean waters. We are, thus, deeply concerned about the alarming levels of plastic and micro-plastic pollution of our oceans, their movement up the food chain, and their consequences for animal and human health.

Domestically, Ghana has established a number of institutions, including the Maritime Authority and the Environmental Protection Agency, to tackle these issues, and ensure a clean marine environment. Our national institutions continue to collaborate with international partners to protect the shipping routes and ships, as well as the country's blue resources, towards ensuring a clean maritime domain. We strongly advocate building effective partnerships, while allowing developing countries to have access to technical and other support in their efforts towards sustainable management of waste, and, in particular, in dealing with the effects of plastics.

The West African region has one of the world's most productive fishing grounds, which attract commercial vessels that supply the markets of Europe and Asia. Fish is a preferred source of animal protein for the Ghanaian people, and the fisheries sector supports livelihoods of some 10 percent of Ghana's population of about 27 million people. However, most of Ghana's fishery resources are heavily

overexploited, and only a fraction of the country's annual fish requirements is produced currently. Ghana has experienced a major decline in its fish stocks that is linked to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) methods by foreign-owned vessels.

The growing incidence of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is, therefore, of significant concern to Ghana, as it contributes to overexploitation and the depletion of fish stocks in our waters, as well as globally. To address this problem at the national level, the Government of Ghana, with the assistance of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, in May 2014, elaborated a Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, consisting of a 20-point action plan to address issues ranging from regional fisheries management and market mechanisms, to the use of port and flag state controls. We strongly advocate enhanced international cooperation for effective monitoring and a severe sanctions regime to address the problem. Moreover, we intend to devote greater national resources to combat this menace to our marine resources.

Unfair competition, in the form of fish subsidies and non-tariff measures, is having a negative impact on trade in fish. For over 15 years, the WTO has grappled with the difficult process of finding agreement on fish subsidies. Ghana calls for the swift conclusion of WTO negotiations in addressing this issue, and hopes that, in the interest of the health of our oceans and the sustainability of the global fishing industry, subsidies that encourage overcapacity and overfishing will be prohibited sooner rather than later. The speed, with which the world community concludes such an agreement, will be a truer reflection of the sincerity of the commitment to the preservation of the health of our oceans, than any amount of words and official declarations in this regard.

Excellencies,

The impact of climate change on the oceans is alarming, and likely to exacerbate the existing impacts of anthropogenic activities in the marine environment. The gradual warming of our oceans and increasing acidification, and their effects on the marine environment and resources, need to be addressed through the speedy implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which many Member States have signed and ratified, including Ghana, and which represents the blue print for global action to reverse this trend. The recent announcement of the withdrawal of the USA from the agreement is a disturbing development, which Ghana believes, like the majority of the global community, requires urgent reconsideration by the new US administration. We have to work together to protect our planet.

We would urge the international community to build on the various continental and regional programmes that have led to significant progress in the protection and preservation of the marine environment. Ghana believes that implementation of SDG 14 must also encompass continental approaches, and build on continental arrangements and initiatives, such as the AU's 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIM Strategy) and the declaration of the Decade of Africa's Seas and Oceans. Apart from protecting Africa's marine environment, the strategy also seeks to enhance Africa's Blue Economy through job creation, and to utilise effectively the common maritime and coastal resources.

Ghana has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which has at its core the integration of the environmental, social and economic dimensions of ocean activities. We believe that the Convention provides a good legal framework, within which our efforts towards the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources can be situated. We urge

speedy implementation of the 35 year old Convention and assistance to states parties to that end. The Fish Stock Agreement and the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing are examples of instruments which can advance the conservation and protection of marine resources, if they were to gain wider international acceptance and ratification. Ghana has ratified both instruments.

Excellencies,

This Conference must mark the turning point in the conservation and sustainable use of our oceans for present and future generations. We must work hand in hand to reverse the cycle of decline and restore the health, productivity and resilience of oceans and marine ecosystems. We have no other option.

We support the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders, including Governments, intergovernmental organizations, financial institutions, non-governmental and civil society organizations, as well as academia and scientific communities, in finding solutions, and in tackling collectively the critical problems related to our oceans. Increasing scientific knowledge, and developing research capacity and transfer of marine technology, will be critical.

Excellencies,

The targets under the SDG 14 include prevention and significant reduction of marine pollution of all kinds by 2025, and sustainably managing and protecting marine and coastal ecosystems. The outputs expected from this Conference include a list of voluntary commitments for the implementation of SDG 14. It is my pleasure to announce that my government, on behalf of the people of Ghana, is able to pledge two commitments towards the implementation of SDG 14:

1. we will eliminate pollution on the Ghana coast and significantly reduce pollution in the marine ecosystem by 2025, by tackling the current challenges posed by use of plastics and indiscriminate disposal of waste;
2. we will complete the assessment of ecologically sensitive areas along the Ghana coast, and designate Ghana's first marine protected area by 2025, to safeguard coastal and marine biodiversity.

Ghana is of the firm conviction that the successful implementation of SDG 14 will facilitate the emergence of the new African civilisation that the African peoples are determined to build, where there is accountable governance in which respect for the rule of law, individual liberties and human rights, and the principles of democratic accountability are guaranteed; where the economies of Africa look beyond the production of commodities to position themselves at the high value end of the global marketplace; and where Africans free themselves from a mindset of dependence, aid, charity and handouts to mobilise the immeasurable resources of Africa, including its enormous marine resources, to resolve Africa's problems of poverty and development.

Let us all put our hands to the wheel and take up the challenge for the sake of our oceans, our planet and our common humanity.

I thank you for your attention.