

The Ocean Conference – High level, 5–9 June 2017
Statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Slovenia

Mr President, Co-Presidents of the conference, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure to address you on behalf of the Republic of Slovenia at the first UN Ocean Conference. While aligning myself with the statement made earlier by the European Union and its Member States, I would like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

At the outset, I would like to extend my government's outmost appreciation for the tremendous work done by the organisers of this conference. Being aware of the rapid decline in ocean health, this conference comes at a critical time, a time that calls for our concerted resolve and global action to #SaveOurOceans.

Slovenia is reaffirming its commitment to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its Goal 14. We are determined to continue contributing actively at the national, as well as regional, macro-regional and global levels.

Mr President,

As a maritime state situated on the shore of the Adriatic Sea and in the broader Mediterranean region, Slovenia recognizes the multifaceted challenges relating to the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources. This is particularly true as its characteristics place the Adriatic Sea among small seas, where flora and fauna are especially vulnerable to human activities. Due to climate change, small seas are warming up much faster. This affects their water balance and, in turn, their biodiversity. Additional significant pressure is caused by factors such as changes in acidity and salinity, marine litter and excessive fishing.

With a view to promoting sustainable development of fisheries, Slovenia supports historic, traditional fishing practices, which have a minimal impact on the marine environment. Small-scale coastal fisheries now represent about 90% of Slovenian fisheries. In this context, Slovenia attaches great importance to regional cooperation for sustainable fisheries management.

Slovenia is also actively tackling marine pollution, including marine litter. The recent international assessment reports (DeFishGear Project) affirm that marine litter and micro plastic are a major environmental problem, including in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. **Proper and efficient waste management, reduction of land based litter, sustainable plastic design and reducing the use of micro plastic in products are critical.** Slovenia is an active party of the Barcelona Convention under the umbrella of which the guidelines for tackling marine litter have been adopted. We remain committed to furthering cooperation in addressing these challenges. To this end, Slovenia, in cooperation with the neighbouring countries, will continue to organise training events aimed at a common response to marine pollution.

Furthermore, in the context of the importance of interconnectedness between marine and coastal ecosystems, **I would like to point out recent Slovenia's achievement in addressing the coexistence of a port with the natural reserve in its immediate vicinity.** With the closure of the road between two coastal towns, **Slovenia dedicated almost one tenth of its coastal belt for sustainable use of the coast and the sea.** This measure created a green corridor, i.e. a connection between ecosystems and habitats, with two neighbouring countries. We hope that this example of good practice will inspire other examples of interdisciplinary cooperation and urbanisation. A video on this project entitled "*Towards the Green Coast: The case of Slovenia*" is available on the website, Twitter and Facebook of Slovenia's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York.

Mr President,

Our seas are not only connected to our coasts, they are also linked with oceans. With their powerful impact on the planet's climate and human lives, high seas require close attention and effective action. SDG14 targets clearly attest to this.

This includes devoting special attention to those ocean inhabitants that go beyond national borders and require vast ocean areas, namely cetaceans. Their conservation requires joint efforts and shared management. **Slovenia contributed to this end by hosting two regular meetings of the International Whaling Commission**, the leading international body tasked with conservation and sustainable management of cetaceans. We are pleased that our country contributed to the unanimous adoption of the first decision regarding dolphins, which was outstanding for decades. In line with Slovenia's longstanding interest in marine research, we also hosted three regular meetings of the Commission's Scientific Committee.

Mr President,

Proper conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources also depend on the **full implementation of UNCLOS**, the cornerstone international legal instrument for the law of the sea. Slovenia therefore awaits the fourth session of the **BBNJ** PrepCom with high expectations. **We call for the opening of negotiations on a new agreement under UNCLOS during the 72nd General Assembly session.**

Today, it is broadly accepted that successful responding to environmental challenges requires a global action. In this context, Slovenia deeply regrets the decision by the United States to withdraw from the historic first universal legally binding global climate deal – the Paris Agreement. **Slovenia remains committed to global climate action and calls for the strengthening of partnerships and cooperation in achieving the goals set with respect to climate and SDG 14.**

Mr President,

This conference is an important opportunity for the international community to commit to the strengthening of its efforts to #SaveOurOceans, including through global, regional and macro-regional cooperation. To this end, and as announced during the recent Blue Economy Conference (Marseilles, 30th – 31st May 2017), Slovenia will advocate for increased cooperation and new synergies between the Mediterranean states, with the aim to effectively respond to biodiversity challenge through the establishment of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean high seas.

We look forward to the adoption of the Call for Action.

Let me conclude by offering Slovenia's best wishes for tomorrow's global celebration of the World Oceans Day.

Thank you.