



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS

STATEMENT

PLENARY MEETING

SDG 14 OCEAN CONFERENCE, GENERAL ASSEMBLY HALL

NEW YORK

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Colleagues,

At the outset, Mauritius wishes to express its thanks and appreciation to the Governments of Fiji and Sweden for this High-Level Conference on Oceans, an issue which is of the greatest importance to us, as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS). As we usually say, what happens at your neighbour's place has an impact on your home. Here, the ocean is our neighbour, and everything that harms it inevitably harms us. The Integrity of oceans and seas is pivotal for SIDS development.

Moreover, Mauritius would like to align itself on the statement delivered by G77 and China, the African Group and AOSIS. The health of our planet depends on the health of the Oceans as does the livelihood of many people around the world, be it directly or indirectly. Oceans play a vital role in the regulation of climate and as the largest carbon sink of the planet. Oceans are also very important not only as a source of food but also economic activity, especially for island and coastal States which are heavily dependent on tourism and fisheries.

Excellencies,

Mauritius has always been at the forefront when issues relating to small island states are concerned. Mauritius hosted the UN Conference on SIDS in 2005 where the focus was on continued economic, environmental vulnerability on SIDS.

It is essential that during and after this Conference, we develop partnerships for SIDS to enable them to give effect to their status as “large Ocean States”, and continue to raise awareness, strengthening implementation of measures in favour of marine biodiversity, cross-sectoral cooperation, increased marine scientific research and enhancing ocean frontiers and multi-sectoral partnerships. Targets 14.7, 14.a and 14.b within SDG 14 are of critical importance to SIDS. Without Capacity-Building, Transfer of Technology and financing for implementation, SIDS will not be able to fully implement the 2030 Agenda including SDG 14. The development of innovative and sustainable infrastructure to sustainably exploit Oceans will be critical for the development of SIDS. Thus, Capacity Building and Transfer of Technology are priorities where there is a need for a concrete mechanism to trigger adequate assistance.

We are confident that the Call for Action will provide a basis on which to build synergies and partnerships between Governments and all stakeholders, including civil society, scientists and coastal communities, bearing in mind our ultimate goal, namely, a healthy ocean, clean of debris and persistent organic pollutants, that can be a sustainable source of livelihood for communities, and which can continue to play a vital role in mitigating global warming and be a stable climate regulator.

Excellencies,

We are pleased to underline that the Republic of Mauritius, which has an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of about 2.3 million square kilometers, is deeply committed to embed and monitor greater sustainability as it develops its “ocean economy”. We are fully supportive of the UN Ocean Conference and are confident that clear objectives can be reached by consensus to save our oceans.

There are 11 Voluntary Commitments from the Government of Mauritius and governmental institutions, while there are also several others from the private sector, NGOs and civil society. The 12 VCs can be accessed on the Ocean Conference website.

Excellencies,

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) and Middle Income Country (MIC), Mauritius needs the oceans to be healthy as the seas constitute a source of employment and income. At the same time, Government is ensuring that sustainability and transparency into any investment program designed to develop the ocean economy are factored in and that proper environmental impact assessments are carried out. Acidification, global warming, coral bleaching, sea level rise, biodiversity loss, and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, are all challenges that are threatening the oceans, and the Government of Mauritius is leaving no stone unturned to tackle such threats.

At the national level, the main legal frameworks that regulate the marine environment are: The Environment Protection Act 2002, the Fisheries and Marine Resources Act 2007, the Tourism Act 2006, the Wastewater Management Authority Act 2000, and the Maritime Zone Act 2005.

Mauritius is also a member of the:

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC); South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission (SWIOFC) and the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA).

As a member of these organisations, Mauritius implements all their fishery conservation and management measures. We have also signed the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries - International fishery conservation and management measures and the FAO Port State Control Measures. We also co-operate in the implementation of the Convention for Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCMLAR).

Mauritius is working closely with all relevant institutions and groupings, including the European Union, OPFIS, the ACP Group, the Indian Ocean Commission, the IOKA 1, the Commission for the

Excellencies,

Some of the key work currently undertaken by the Ministry of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping include constant monitoring of sea water quality to reduce marine pollution, mangrove propagation, long-term coral reef monitoring and coral farming, plantation of 400,000 mangroves, close season for net fishing, two-month closure of octopus fishing to prevent over-exploitation, implementation of a bank fishery management plan based on the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) principles and a Port State Control Unit to implement Regional and International Marine Conservation Management measures amongst others.

The Government has also set up a National Ocean Council which is the driving force for all ocean-related projects and development. Government also recognizes the need to better exploit, in a sustainable manner, the resources of our EEZ, and meet the socioeconomic objectives. Furthermore, the Government is encouraging SMEs to embark into new projects such as fish breeding and farming, pearl and oyster culture, algae farming etc.

Ocean Economy rests in the protection of its maritime health and the preservation of its biological diversity. In line with the Rio+20 Declaration and more recently the adoption of the 17 SDGs during the UN Sustainable Development Summit held in September 2015, Mauritius is focusing its Strategy for sustainably developing the Ocean Economy while striving to achieve the targets as set out in SDG 14 for 'life below Water'.

The effective management of the maritime zones with respect to security, exploration, protection of resources and development require appropriate delimitations and conscious of these needs, Mauritius is undertaking a Marine Spatial Plan.

The joint management area (JMA) between Mauritius and the Seychelles is also a good example of joint collaboration between neighbouring countries.

Furthermore to ensure that all measures are taken for a sustainable ocean development, the Mauritius Oceanography Institute conducts, through an ecosystem-based management of the ocean, seas and marine resources, regular scientific studies, exploring baseline surveys and putting together monitoring plans. These activities are carried out in terms of Physical baseline data, Chemical baseline data, Biological baseline data, Remote Sensing and GIS.

Excellencies,

As we all know, UNCLOS is generally considered to be the global “Constitution for the Oceans” and sets out a number of maritime zones subject to State jurisdiction. But despite provisions in UNCLOS, there exist major gaps in the governance of ABNJ, hence the objective of having an international legally binding instrument (ILBI) to deal with BBNJ, since currently not all human activities in ABNJ are adequately regulated and not all regions are covered.

UNCLOS as it is framed, is not predominantly an environmental or biodiversity treaty. At the time of its conception, Member States laid more emphasis in having rules to regulate shipping, fishing and the exploitation of the oceans resources for economic purposes. Despite provisions related to the protection of the marine environment, the focus was more on exploiting, for economic purposes, the oceans’ resources and to bring economic development.

We therefore hope that the negotiations for the new ILBI will be successful and that the eventual ILBI will succeed in complementing adequately UNCLOS. To this effect, there are 3 key elements which are necessary to effectively manage and conserve life on the high seas: which are, a clear mandate to conserve the ecosystem as a whole, the ability to manage across multiple sectors and a regulatory mechanism.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the dust has settled, it is critical that follow-up mechanisms are instituted to ensure that the Partnership Dialogues and the Voluntary Commitments are implemented. While different other UN processes dealing with Ocean matters, such as the Informal Consultative Process (ICP), the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, etc., will continue with their respective mandate, the SDG 14 Conference must not be seen as a one-off.

What we all aim to achieve is protection, preservation, conservation and sustainable exploitation of the Oceans. But for this joint-venture to be successful both scientists and policy-makers must seek to increase society's understanding and appreciation of healthy marine ecosystem. Decision-makers need more and better scientific support for their actions and decisions.

Whether we are entrepreneurs, policy-makers, scientists, etc., we should all aim at developing an ethic of care for the ocean. We must accept that humans have both direct and indirect impacts on the marine environment. We should also see planet Earth and its Ocean as part of us, as our habitat and feel one with all living creatures. It is only through this process that we can develop an identity as Earthlings and be successful in preserving the Ocean and help Mother Nature.