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.

**Plenary statement of the
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)**

Delivered on 9 June by Kadiatou Sall-Beye, Project Officer

Dear Mr President, Excellences, Distinguished Representatives,

Today, we face unprecedented challenges to ensure the preservation and health of the ocean, while at the same time in ensuring people everywhere have access to sustainably managed water and sanitation services.

Sustainable oceans management underpin all the SDGs. It is estimated that the oceans feed about 3 billion people with fish as their primary source of protein and as the repository for 97% of our planet's water in the water cycle, as well as contributing to the broader water supply. The oceans play a vital role in regulating the temperature of the planet and driving the rainfall patterns on which half of the planet's population depend on directly for their fresh water supply.

Did you know that about 1.8 billion people must use contaminated drinking water? Or that 2.4 billion people lack access to suitable sanitation facilities? And over 840,000 people die every year from preventable water-borne diseases?

The ITU is joining one of the core messages of this conference that everyone, everywhere, is affected by what goes on in the oceans, regardless of where they live.

Water problems are getting worse, due to climate change, and the oceans are also an important part of the process of climate change, and the rise in sea levels around the world is recognized as one of the most devastating consequences of global warming.

By 2030, our growing global population will need at least 40% more water for drinking, washing, and cooking. Water shortages are contributing to political unrest, for example in 'dust-bowl', a region of the Middle East, water may soon become more valuable than oil.

Meanwhile, major changes in sea level could re-draw the map of the world in thirty years, this means that some low-lying suburbs of places here in New York City, where we sit today could potentially join places like Venice on the list of 'sinking cities.

The <u>First World Ocean Assessment</u> and Intergovernmental Ocean Commission have noted that humankind's deeds on the ocean have already triggered a massive decline in oceans' health. We are fast approaching a critical point and we have to take collective actions to stop the detrimental ways we use the oceans, before this damage becomes irreversible.

The world's first 'climate change refugees' displaced due to rising sea levels include islanders, from places like Tuvalu, Kiribati and soon, the Maldives. The questions we need to ask are – who can we ensure they are the world's last 'climate change' refugees? How far – and how fast – is the sea level actually rising? And what can we do to reverse the negative effects?

The ITU believes that all solutions can be implemented more effectively through harnessing the potential benefits of Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs). ICT's can play a vital role in helping to preserve our oceans, seas and marine ecosystem and their resources for sustainable development.

The ITU believes that in order to protect the oceans, we need to map them and understand the extensiveness of the interactions with other water systems. The ITU allocates orbital positions for scientific satellite imagery and spectrum bands for scientific activities used to record information like sea level, polar ice caps, oil spills and other types of pollution, as well as monitoring damage to coastal areas and more.

Tracking technologies can be used to monitor wildlife migration and shipping patterns. Satellite imagery can also be combined with maps generated from the Internet of Things, big data , and the latest tagging and tracking technologies to monitor shipping patterns, traffic and routes in real-time.

ICTs can be also used to certify cargo activities, monitor illegal fishing activities, help ships to consume less fuel, find routes that can help protect certain marine environments, prevent accidents and collisions that can lead to pollution.

Moreover, sensor networks are being used to help build safe water management, sanitation systems, monitor river levels flow rates and pollution levels in rivers. Smart water management systems are also helping to make water consumption more efficient, reducing leakage and pollution in rivers, lakes and canals.

The ITU has taken action working with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, and the World Meteorological Organization through a Joint Task Force helping to equip new communication cables on the ocean floor with sensors for data observation and seismic warnings.

Today, ITU applauds this conference and stresses that the Oceans must be prioritized and well-funded through partnerships. People need sustainable access to the resources of the Oceans. All human lives depend on it and we must all take on the responsibility to preserve our Earth as we know it. Failure is simply not an option; ITU stands ready to contribute to the vital work of the United Nations and other stakeholder's trough leveraging the power of ICTs/telecommunication services in preserving the health of ocean. **I thank you.**