



**PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

Statement delivered by: His Excellency Mr. Viliami Va‘inga Tōnē, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Tonga to the United Nations.

Purpose of the meeting: Intergovernmental Consultations on the Declaration for the 2022 UN Conference, entitled “*Our ocean, our future, our responsibility*”, to support the implementation of SDG14.

Date: 1st February 2022 (10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. & 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.)

Venue: UN General Assembly Hall, United Nations Headquarters, New York

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Co-facilitators,

1. It is very pleasing to once and for all resume the intergovernmental consultations pertaining to the declaration for the 2022 United Nations Conference to support the implementation of SDG14, after almost two years since we last met to discuss this political declaration. We look forward to coordinating further on this under the able leadership of His Excellency Mr. Martin Bille Herman, the Permanent Representative of Denmark, for which we congratulate His Excellency on his re-appointment, and warmly welcome the first appointment of Her Excellency Ms. Keisha McGuire, the Permanent Representative of Grenada, as co-facilitators.
2. Tonga appreciates the commendable work of the co-facilitators in recognizing and taking into consideration comments and inputs from Member States during the first rounds of consultations, resulting in the enhanced version before us which sets a strong foundation for continuing dialogues. This is in particular the recognition of the critical role played by indigenous peoples and local communities through traditional and local knowledge, innovation and practices notably in effectively planning and implementing area-based management tools. The coordinated efforts and partnerships at all levels, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in this endeavor is a step in the right direction through a unified path towards achieving SDG14.

Co-facilitators,

3. Tonga in this regard, aligns its statement with that delivered by Fiji on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Samoa on behalf of the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS), Antigua & Barbuda on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and Pakistan on behalf of G77 and China. While we are in support of the “*concrete, science-based and innovative solutions*” outlined in the current draft, we are also in favour of a stronger, imminent, and a more succinct “*science-based and innovative approaches*” aimed at reversing the declining health of the ocean through “*sustainable recovery, particularly in the context of augmenting the blue economy and advancing nature-based solutions for oceans*”, as alluded to by the Chair of AOSIS.

Co-facilitators,

4. Given the recent *off-the-scale* eruption of the Hunga-Tonga Hunga-Ha’apai volcano and subsequent tsunami in Tonga, we believe it is critical to include disaster risk reduction and post disaster recovery from ocean-related extreme weather events as measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change. This, more than ever, emphasizes the complementary relationship between the Oceans, extreme weather events and Climate Change.
5. To this end, we would like to once again underscore the importance of ensuring maritime boundaries are not eroded by the onset of sea level rise nor the rights and entitlements that flow from them, resulting from the negative effects of the climate-ocean nexus. With several years of maintaining this position, our Pacific Islands Forum leaders officially endorsed the “*Declaration of Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate-Change Related Sea-Level Rise*”, thereby recognizing the principles of legal stability, security, certainty and predictability that underpin UNCLOS and the relevance of these principles to the interpretation and application of the Convention in the context of sea-level rise and climate change.

Co-facilitators,

6. With the alarming 12 million tonnes of plastic wastes that are leaked into our ocean annually, we are in favour of embracing a common global vision to reduce additional marine plastic litter pollution to zero, building towards a global instrument to addressing this global problem.

7. Last but certainly not least, it must be highlighted that in order to attain a successful blue economy, one must recognize that it would be extremely costly to restore the productivity, goods and services from our oceans once lost, and there is no greater gift to future generations but the saving of our ocean and our planet.

I thank you.