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Fiji Statement for the intergovernmental consultations on the declaration for the 2022 United Nations Conference to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

I am pleased to deliver the following remarks on behalf of Fiji and welcome the appointment of the Co-Facilitators, Permanent Representative of Grenada, H.E. Ms. Keisha McGuire, and the re-appointment of H.E. Mr. Martin Bille Hermann, the Permanent Representative of Denmark. We are excited that this crucial Declaration is in your good hands in preparation for the 2nd UN conference on Oceans in a hugely consequential year for oceans.

We welcome the current draft Declaration and thank the Co-Facilitators for the work undertaken thus far. The current draft declaration reflects the challenges facing the World's oceans. Nowhere are these challenges more pressing than in the BluePacific.

As the Co-Chair of the first-ever UN Oceans Conference together with Sweden, Fiji welcomes the progress on Oceans across the work of the UN; Fiji is firmly committed to engaging in this review and update process and wishes to register some initial comments that seek to strengthen the Declaration to take account of developments over the last two years and seek a better integration of Oceans related international developments in 2022.

We are deeply concerned that the health and sustainability of the World's Oceans and the BluePacific especially – the World's largest continent, is under intensifying threat from climate change. Climate change impacts such as ocean warming, acidification, and sea-

level rise pose grave health, economic, and security threats to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and low-lying communities around the world that depend on the Ocean. The climate services that the wetlands, mangroves, seagrass, and all aquatic carbon sinks provide are becoming increasingly vulnerable. They are becoming increasingly vulnerable because of land-based actions in agriculture, waste management, and climate change.

Recognizing how precariously close the World is to the 1.5 degrees Celsius target for global warming the Declaration for the 2nd UN Conference needs to speak with greater urgency; call for renewed commitments that are necessary to keep 1.5 degrees Celsius on track. The Declaration must reflect a strengthening of ocean-climate nexus, pathways, and actions. It must also reflect the need to redress the loss and damage faced by maritime communities as a consequence of climate change.

We propose therefore more targeted references in the Declaration to the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement arising from progress at COP26, and reflecting on the desire to lift climate ambition through enhanced Ocean-based actions. This may include raising ambition to designating 100 percent of EEZ as marine managed areas, to protection and management of mangroves, wetlands and aquatic blue carbon sinks; to increasing areas under MPA's including on highly sensitive areas on the high seas.

Co-facilitators,

The Pacific Islands leaders and communities have drawn the attention of the international community to sea level rise and its impact on the security of states and communities. In this respect, we are deeply concerned about the need to secure our maritime zones and

the rights and the entitlements that flow from them without reduction due to sea-level rise.

We, therefore, urge that the *Declaration of Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate-Change Related Sea Level Rise* be reflected in the Draft declaration, as it gives to the foundation principles of equity and stability in international law. We can only protect, and preserve what we know we will have jurisdiction over in near future; and over many years to come. The certainty of maritime jurisdictions provides the certainty that is required for oceans actions.

Fiji welcomes the language of eliminating the discharges of marine plastic litter and microplastics into the ocean. Pacific island small states contribute less than 0.3 percent of plastic waste. Nevertheless, the BluePacific over which we assert our stewardship is now saturated with some 70 percent of the World's plastic waste; including waste produced from the COVID-19. The Declaration must therefore lend firm support for a Treaty on plastics and marine litter.

In our international efforts to sustain healthy plastic-free oceans, we reaffirm our call for a new legally binding agreement on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution and urge all UN Member States at the Fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly to support the establishment of an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to produce a new legally binding agreement covering the whole life cycle of plastics. For such a Declaration to have credibility, it must affirm that that ,small island but large oceanic states, as in the Pacific, are supported financially and are afforded the necessary resources and capacity to manage, reduce and oversee plastic and marine litter.

We welcome the emphasis on oil seepage, sewage, agricultural and aquaculture runoff, and industrial waste. In addition, Fiji recommends the elimination of nuclear contamination to ensure this source of pollution is addressed and the Oceans do not become a dumping ground for nuclear waste.

Co-facilitators ,

Small Island States are stewards and custodians of vast areas, we hold jurisdiction over nearly 30% of the World's EEZ and hold in high regard the current negotiations for a new International Legally-Binding Instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement).

As large oceanic states, we have a critical interest in protecting the health of our oceans and in doing so the health of our planet as well, therefore the draft resolution must also reflect this.

Co-facilitators ,

The current draft does not reference the economic impact caused by COVID-19. SIDS such as Fiji were amongst the most vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic, as it disrupted key economic sectors that our already fragile economies relied upon. COVID-19 has had devastating impacts on food security with exponential increases arising from trade disruptions, and loss of jobs in the service sectors.

Fiji reminds the world that the Blue Pacific is already the largest source of blue foods for the planet. It is likely to become the main source of all of the World's protein by 2050. With a future that is warmer than 1.5; this role and this destiny for the Blue Pacific can no longer be taken for granted.

Blue Food Systems serve as an anchoring pillar in the development and maintenance of sustainable foods, health and security in Fiji. We welcome the progress reached through the World Food Summit and its recognition of the place of blue/aquatics foods. This progress and the crucial role of sustainable blue/aquatic foods needs reflection and consideration in the Declaration.

This is even more important given that 2022 is the year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture. Degradation of reef systems; IUU and land-based activities have led to the near collapse of coastal fisheries in many communities and regions. Livelihoods of whole communities are threatened and the impacts of this on women and girls is especially profound. The declaration needs to chart a path forward for women and girls, and such coastal communities as a whole.

Tackling IUU, managing fish stocks sustainable, and eliminating harmful fishing practices, among other areas, need to be reflected in our commitment to restoring ocean health and the health of communities. Even more so, eliminating harmful fisheries subsidies is crucial if destructive practices are to be contained.

Co-facilitators,

Fiji considers the Ocean economy as the solution and catalyst for long-term, inclusive and sustainable development. Fiji also recognizes the significance of enhancing science-based and innovative approaches to promote a resilient, sustainable recovery within the context of Oceans economy to advance nature-based solutions for oceans.

Investing in ocean health through sustainable blue economy activities can help reduce greenhouse gases, improve coastal resilience, and reset and rebuild economic activities in ways that will ensure a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient ocean economy fit for everyone's future. But there is only so much that small states can do to bring innovations, science, and technology to scale and impact. The Declaration needs to go beyond capacity building to build resilient knowledge systems; expand the skills that are needed; and create sustainable mechanisms to enable small states to lift their game on oceans protection.

Co-facilitators,

The 2nd Oceans Conference is a stock take on SDG14 and we know we are off track. How our advice is taken will shape, how well and how substantively the world can respond to these rapidly growing threats and vulnerabilities. We need to understand that many countries have made significant progress and others less so. The economic pressures arising from COVID-19 have been substantial on small states. The blue investments that are necessary have simply not been available on a scale and at low cost to these countries and yet some of them have jurisdiction over large areas of the Ocean. Fiji's EEZ extends to well over a million square kilometers for example.

The declaration must therefore make a call for significant increase in affordable blue finance on grant and long-term concessionary rates for small states. To not do so will

mean that we will end up with an even larger blue divide – rich countries making significant progress on SDG 14 and small states being left behind.

We SIDS have borne the worst socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and our climb back to the SDG path is steepest. While other countries talk about recovery and growth, we talk about the impacts of climate catastrophes and basic food security. Our path to 1.5 degrees Celsius and the threat of sea level rise is a stark reminder of our elevated vulnerability. It does not have to be this way. We need to ensure that the Declaration puts the most vulnerable at its core. The apartheid of access to climate finance must end, the declaration must reflect this and the conference is an opportunity to bridge this blue inequity.

Co-facilitators,

The 2nd Oceans Conference can be historic. It can also be a lost opportunity. Its historic nature will be elevated if the political declaration reflects, welcomes and enables strong outcomes from the One Ocean Summit, Our Oceans Summit, 2021 UN food Systems Summit, the BBNJ negotiations, The UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, the UN Decade of Oceans Science, the post 2020 CBD.

All these help to enhance, protection, lift ambition and reverse the decline on the health of the World's oceans.. The 2nd Oceans Conference and this Declaration is an opportunity to reflect on how these are woven together. Now is the time for bold action to protect our environment and invest in a sustainable blue economy that will benefit people and nature. Fiji will take to the floor of the 2nd Oceans Conference to remind World leaders of how fundamental the health of the Blue Pacific is to the economic, security and the wellbeing

of people, communities and Governments across the world to their livelihoods and to the well-being of the planet as a whole.