

2022 UNITED NATIONS OCEAN CONFERENCE
ONLINE STAKEHOLDER BRIEFING: INPUTS TO THE POLITICAL
DECLARATION ZERO DRAFT

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Intervention

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Dear esteemed colleagues, I am here today representing the Universities Consortium of Small Island States, A UN Multi-Stakeholder Partnership that has the mission of strengthening the capacity, role and contribution of island based and indigenous universities, higher education institutions and research organizations; strengthening and leveraging ties between island universities and the islands diaspora situated in many higher education institutions worldwide; and working with all institutions of higher education and research in service to islands' sustainable development as per the objectives of the UN SDGs, SAMOA Pathway and other well meaning agreements.

The Consortium supports the reiteration in this political statement, of the commitment to SDG14 with particular emphasis on science and innovation; stocktaking, partnerships and solutions, with participation of civil society. The Consortium urges Heads of State and Government to prioritize inclusion of island based and indigenous universities, higher education institutions and research organizations and the islands diaspora of academics and researchers globally, to promote this objective.

To this end, the Consortium also recognizes and supports the science-based and innovation actions laid out as point 11 in this political statement, including: integrated ocean management, restoring fish stocks, controlling marine pollution and plastics litter, area-based management tools; and mitigating and adapting to climate change. We concur that these are all urgent priorities but also add two observations.

First, we must harness science based and innovation driven actions for short, medium and long term sustained action and solutions. These threats require a measure of urgency for short term relief but the prize remains in sustained action that ensures that such threats do not arise to such an extent in the future. Investments today will create benefited multiplied later on.

Second, science based and innovation driven approaches should not only be reactionary by nature. We continue to find ourselves on the backfoot, combatting these challenges of pollution, resource depletion, lack of the right tools to get the job done, with our proverbial backs to the wall. No, we must harness the power of science and technology to get in front of potential threats and be proactive in approach as much as we can. This can only be done when the esteemed Heads of States and Governments invest in island based and indigenous universities, higher education institutions and research organizations with a level of pride and dignity that they deserve in our societies, where mere fractions of a percent of GDP is invested in science and technology innovation.

The Consortium identifies point 7 of this political statement as a pivotal one. Small island states with ocean-based economies have been devastated by the pandemic which has overlaid its burdens on existing burdens of high economic indebtedness and the shadows of increasing climate impacts. Our science, technology and innovation efforts must be directly tied and applied to sustainable economic development from community to national to regional and inter-regional levels. This is of highest priority for the public to understand and appreciate the value of investing in science and technology. When this is done, public sentiment encourages more of the same. This political statement must elaborate much, much more on the linkages between every good intention rightly made under point 12, and the effect or impact on sustainable economic development that will pull small island economies out of post pandemic depression, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of people.

The Consortium recognizes and agrees with a number of statements made under point 12 of this political statement. Point 12 (a) notes the needs for data collection efforts, which always has been and always will because the natural and anthropocentric world is in continuous change. But as we strive to do so, the lack of, must not deter our efforts to make the best decisions with the available data, using new technologies, tools and methodologies at our disposal. Science is such that we improve our approaches as more data and analysis makes the pathway forward clearer.

Point 12 (c) and (d) regards public-private partnerships. We would add entrepreneurship emphasis to this. Too many times, the private sector is not prioritized and insertion points in our intergovernmental processes, for their inputs, are not obvious, to them or to inter-governmental agencies. We urge our esteemed Heads of State and Government to utilize this Universities Consortium of Small Island States as a multilateral conduit to build private enterprise and private sector two-way flows of ideas, expertise, resources and collaboration, to increase science and innovation research and training capital. The private sector is often far advanced on science and technology frontiers that can be harnessed by wider society and universities can work with them, enhance their research efforts and make this reality.

Lastly, point 12 (h) of this political statement identifies the need to strengthen the science-policy interface. One way to do this, which continues to be lacking, is for the formal policy making systems of government to be more inclusive of the scientific and academic/ research communities including indigenous institutions and human resources as well as the islands diaspora of experts situated globally. This is termed participatory capacity building whereby by. inclusion of these groups in the policy process, both sides, science and policy learn from each other and how to work better, share strengths and overcome weaknesses. Entrenched processes such as outsourcing government consulting and services to foreign experts when island experts and diaspora can be of equal service, must be re-thought, or island science, technology and innovation communities will remain sidelined. The Universities Consortium of Small Island States is a vehicle for moving the practice of the science-policy interface, the art and science of doing so, forward and we invite Heads of State and Governments to work with us in doing so.