

Statement to be delivered by Captain Stephen Thomas, Director General of the Maritime Administration (MARAD) on behalf of the Government of Guyana during the General Debate of the 2022 United Nations Oceans Conference

Lisbon, Portugal

Presidents of the Conference

Excellencies,

It is my distinct honour to represent the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana at this 2022 United Nations Conference to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14. Allow me also to express Guyana's appreciation to the Governments of Portugal and Kenya for their able stewardship in successfully convening this very important conference.

Excellencies,

Undoubtedly, our oceans are under great stress, as evidenced by the troubling decline in biodiversity, which further endangers the survival of our planet, especially since millions of people worldwide depend on coastal and marine ecosystems for food, livelihoods, and coastal protection. Life below water is increasingly being threatened by acidification, global warming, rising sea levels, overfishing and pollution of the marine environment. Particularly, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the Low-Lying Coastal States such as Guyana have the challenging task of developing their blue economies while simultaneously mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Guyana has an ocean area which is more than half of our territorial area, and is also part of the Guiana Shield, which hosts 20% of the world's fresh water. The ocean area offers a new frontier for sustainable development by expanding the ocean/ blue economy. Our forests also serve as carbon sinks and it is within this context that the Government of Guyana has prioritised the bridging of the land-ocean nexus via low-carbon growth, as outlined in the expanded Low Carbon

Development Strategy 2030 (LCDS 2030), which will cover key areas such as fishing, ocean biodiversity and mangroves, and shipping and transport.

Guyana also continues to act strategically and responsibly in supporting global energy security while diversifying and decarbonising Guyana's domestic economy and investing in development priorities for all Guyanese. We are cognizant that maritime security has evolved to include not only national security but protection of the marine environment, as well as economic considerations.

Guyana places great importance on the sustainable use and conservation of marine resources. To that end, a draft Maritime Economy Plan has been developed to enhance capacities for conserving and protecting our ecological, coastal, and marine systems. A Mangrove Restoration programme has also been implemented to focus on restoring coastal mangroves, research, monitoring, community engagement and public awareness.

Additionally, Guyana is being strategic in its approach to single-use plastics to comprehensively address the problem of plastic pollution of the marine spaces. Further, the Government is working to ensure a climate-ready fisheries sector by protecting its fishing grounds, shifting its fish stocks, reducing the carbon footprint of our fishing fleet, and raising awareness on climate adaptation with all categories of fisherfolk.

At the international level, Guyana upholds the actions identified in the Commonwealth Blue Charter and has joined the Global Ocean Alliance to support the protection of at least 30% of the global ocean by 2030. We are also integrally involved in the negotiations for an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ), and we look forward to participating in negotiations within the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to negotiate and conclude an internationally legally binding instrument on plastic pollution.

Excellencies,

Policies and strategies geared towards implementing SDG14 must be premised on science and data. Inclusive and adaptive governance models and holistic learning-based approaches, are also necessary. Further, leveraging partnerships is key to promoting investments and innovative technology, scaling up finance, capacity building, technological transfer, and access to data.

Important also is the need for all countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in keeping with the 1.5 degrees target to mitigate the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events. The scaling up of blue finance and the need to move beyond Official Development Assistance (ODA) are also critical, particularly for SIDS, whose economies depend heavily on tourism and fish revenues but have been burdened by increasing external and public debt due to the pandemic and the rising global food and fuel prices. We must not look at SDG14 in isolation. Instead, we must consider its inextricable link to the implementation of the other SDGs and avoid duplication of efforts, especially because the ocean is at the heart of a sustainable planet.

Excellencies,

Guyana believes that given the importance of our ocean and its resources for sustainable development, the onus is on us to protect it, not just for the enjoyment of future generations, but for the well-being, prosperity, and resilience of our planet.

As such Guyana will continue to contribute to global efforts to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of SDG 14. In this regard, we look forward to working closely with regional and international partners to explore solutions to the existing and new challenges associated with the sustainable use of our oceans.

I thank you.