

His Excellency Marcelo Rebelo De Sousa, President of Portugal, His Excellency Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya, His Excellency Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, His Excellencies, Heads of State and Government, Heads of Delegation, Italy would like to express its appreciation for the excellent organisation of this second conference for the SDG14 that will surely catalyse global efforts for an effective ocean action.

Italy has always been committed to ocean and seas protection and conservation, with a key role in the Mediterranean context, also through its active participation to the UN Environment Mediterranean Action Plan for the protection of the marine environment and its coastal region. Within this strategy framework, two bilateral agreements with UNEP/MAP, for a total amount of more than five million euros, were signed and implemented to strengthen concrete international sea policies and cooperation at regional scale.

Indeed, Italy is convinced the Regional dimension is the most suitable scale to cooperate for the achievement of the SDG 14 and its targets. In this perspective, in the last three years Italy has been carrying out, together with French, Spanish and Monegasque neighbours, an important initiative for the International Protection of cetaceans through the designation of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) in the North-Western Mediterranean, to be submitted to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). This initiative integrates the already existing most extended marine Protected area in the Mediterranean, the Pelagos Sanctuary and showcases the long-lasting commitment of Italy for the Protection of the marine environment and its biodiversity at International level.

In the same spirit, Italy is firmly advocating the designation of the Mediterranean Sea as a sulphur emissions controlled area to significantly reduce noxious emissions from ships and deliver substantial benefits to large segments of the coastal population, as well as to marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

Confirming its commitment to the ocean and seas protection, Italy also promotes the key role of an effective ocean *governance* in the international context, including G20 under its Presidency in 2021, where Ocean protection was included among its environmental priorities.

Since 2020, Italy is member of the *Global Ocean Alliance* and of the *High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People*, supporting the achievement of the primary target of 30% of the Global Ocean under protection by 2030 and promoting it also in the context of the post 2020 *Global Biodiversity Framework under the CBD*, both as quantitative and qualitative target.

Italy is also firmly convinced of the need to develop a strong international legal framework to address the threats for the oceans and seas through the adoption of the international Agreement on the marine biodiversity conservation beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Treaty) and the establishment of a global legally binding agreement to combat plastic pollution by 2024.

To prove its firm commitment Italy has joined the *Blue Leaders initiative*, a Countries alliance born in 2019 with the ambition to trigger the achievement of the 30by30 goal for the effective and concrete protection of 30% of the global Ocean, and avoid the so called “paper park scenario”. Italy is proud to be member of the Blue Leaders and call on other governments to join this important initiative.

Italy strongly believes that in order to ensure the protection of ocean, seas and their biodiversity, allowing at the same time their sustainable use, protecting the marine environment and wisely managing its resources is not enough. We also need to restore degraded marine ecosystems, as key components of healthy and productive ocean and seas.

For this reason, Italy has recently launched strategic initiatives for the restoration and protection of marine seabed and habitats. In particular, I would like to mention an ambitious project of 400 million of euros aiming to consolidate and expand the national system of protected areas also through the strengthening of the national system of research and observation of marine and coastal ecosystems, including the wide mapping of marine and coastal fragile ecosystems, as posidonia meadows and corals and the identification areas in need for protection and restoration.

I would like to conclude calling for common, bold urgent and transformative actions. The oceans, climate and biodiversity challenges are upon us now and to face them we do need to change the business as usual approach through an ecological transition, coupled with a socio-economic and cultural transition. But to win these tremendous challenges we have to act not as countries, group of countries or regional groups. We must act as a whole, as humankind and we mustn't leave no one behind, for our common benefit and for the future generations.

Thank you very much.