



MALDIVES

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**Remarks by
Aminath Shauna
Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Technology
at the UNOC Plenary**

28 June 2022

Thank you Chair,

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to the Governments of Portugal and Kenya for co-hosting the 2022 United Nations Ocean Conference and to you Liu Zhenmin for your continued leadership in advocating in regards of Economic and Social Affairs. The Maldives welcomes the Our Ocean, Our Future and Our Responsibility Declaration and we stand committed to acting with urgency and decisiveness to protect our oceans.

Mr Chair,

Water is essential to life, and the majority of our planet's water comes from its oceans. Our lives and our fate as a species, irrespective of where we come from, are dependent on the health of the world's oceans. This is true whether your nation is landlocked, has a vast coastline or is archipelagic. It is also true if you have never been to or seen the ocean. Healthy life on earth, depends on healthy oceans.

Mr Secretary-General,

Since ancient memory, the lives of my people have been intricately bound to the vast oceans that surround our twelve hundred coral islands. Maldivians grow in and around the sea. Simply put, Maldivians are children of the sea and the blue waters surrounding us continue to define who we are as a nation.

The ocean is the lifeline that links us to the rest of the world. It is our lifeblood. Our rich ocean biodiversity powers our economy, contributing to over two-thirds of our total employment,



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60% of our GDP, and almost all our exports. It attracts visitors from around the world, keeping our tourism sector going. Taking care of our ocean is tied to our very survival.

The oceans are dying because of us all. Our have disrupted the natural balance of the oceans. Global heating has led to increased warming of the ocean, and ocean acidification is affecting the migratory patterns of fish, putting our primary food source at risk. Our coral reefs are dying due to bleaching caused by global warming, exposing our homes to destruction from storm surges and soil erosion. Overwhelming amounts of plastics and waste are killing our marine life, and polluting our beaches.

We are here to tell you that the unnerving scientific reports and predictions of our oceans that appear on your desks periodically, is the lived reality of my people. If current practices remain unabated, we risk upending the lives and livelihoods of climate-vulnerable ocean states, such as the Maldives within a few decades. We also risk doing irreversible damage to the habitability of our planet. We are here to plead with all gathered here today, to scale up global ambitions as a matter of utmost urgency, and act now to preserve the health and wealth of our oceans.

We Maldivians do not wish to stand idly while our oceans are dying. We have and will continue to stand up in defence of our oceans. Like our forefathers before us, we use traditional pole and line fishing methods that allows us to sustainably fish our waters, one fish at a time with zero bycatch. We have enacted legislation to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, which at present is a serious threat against sustainable small-scale fisheries and coastal fishing communities like us. We need the international community to show their firm resolve to end IUU fishing alongside harmful fishing subsidies.

We have also implemented bans on shark fishing and continue to advocate for more sustainable regional fisheries management plans. Yet, despite this, we are sadly subject to high import tariffs from some of our main markets on our fish exports. The point I make is that sustainability should be economically viable, and for that we need your support.

I am equally proud to say that the Maldives has begun implementing a ban on the importation, production, and sale of 13 different types of single use plastic, with the goal of phasing out single use plastics by 2023, effectively eliminating the biggest source of marine pollution in our country. To ensure the sustainability of our ocean's resources, my administration has provided legal protection for 79 marine areas, including almost 14% of our coral reefs with plans to expand further.



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We support the global initiative to protect 30 percent of the world's oceans and are working to protecting at least 20 percent of our economic zone.

Yet, no matter how ambitious our actions are, we cannot do it alone. When we say “our oceans” we are not just referring to the 1 million square miles of sea within our borders. We are referring to all our oceans. We are referring to the Atlantic, the Pacific, the Arctic and the Indian Ocean. We are referring to regional seas and waterways too vast in number to be listed here. Our oceans are interlinked, and so must our actions to protect them. To protect one, we must protect all. We need sustainable fisheries to be the norm, not the outlier. We need development that incorporates ocean protection and climate resilience. We need to save our coral reefs by limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees. I am hoping this gathering will mobilize the necessary political will and support that we desperately need.

Distinguished Delegates,

We must all adopt the global target to protect 30 percent and sustainably use 100 percent of our ocean. We must adopt at the earliest an ocean and coastal inclusive post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Because it is only through urgent and effective measures that we will be able to protect our oceans.

Thank you very much!