

**UN Oceans Conference
Lisbon, Portugal**

27th June – 1st July 2022

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jagdish D. Koonjul, G.C.S.K., G.O.S.K.
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the
Republic of Mauritius to the United Nations**

Madam President,

I bring you the greetings of my Prime Minister, Hon Pravind Kumar Jugnauth who could not be here this week.

Madam President,

The grave situation of our oceans caused by the rising sea level, ocean acidification, overfishing and destructive fishing, invasive species, loss of coral reefs, ecosystem degradation and the extinction of endemic species demands our immediate attention.

Plastic pollution, an entirely man-made phenomenon is aggravating the situation further and is likely to threaten not only life below water but also life on land.

States must honour their commitments made in the Paris Agreement and subsequently at Glasgow to ensure that the destruction process is slowed and stopped through resolute action.

We need an ambitious, balanced, practical, effective and robust biodiversity framework together with a legally binding framework to address plastic pollution. At the same time all actions taken in the context of SDG14 should be consistent with existing legal instruments and commitments.

Madam President,

Mauritius has been in the forefront when it comes to plastic pollution. Government has banned the use of plastic since 2020 and today only biodegradable material can be used for producing bags.

Mauritius is a small island developing state with just over 1.3 million people but has a territory comprising 2.3 million square kilometres of EEZ that harbours a unique marine ecosystem and serves as an important trade route in the Indian Ocean. It is a source of food and income for our households, and home to a pristine environment with untapped resources. The Ocean Economy contributes to 10.3% of the GDP of Mauritius.

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing as well as illicit drug trafficking remain major threats to sustainability and maritime safety. We have been enhancing our monitoring, control and surveillance capacity in the recent years with the assistance of our partners but there is still much more to be done.

We continue to implement projects to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change on our oceans. We are very well on track to achieving SDG 14.2. We are restoring our damaged marine ecosystems and preventing further degradation. We have already planted some 400,000 mangroves, covering some 20 hectares of coastal area. We are rehabilitating beaches that suffered from erosion. We are also actively working on a long-term coral reef ecosystem monitoring program. With the assistance of UNDP, we are also restoring our coral reefs with thermal tolerant corals which will better adapt to climate change. And we have cleaned up our marine environment after a devastating oil spill following the Wakashio incident.

Mauritius is actively collaborating with International and Regional Bodies, NGOs, the private sector and the civil society to achieve the SDGs. Under this framework marine turtle conservation project allows for stranded and/or injured marine mammals to be rescued

and given appropriate care at a Government facility. We are also sharing scientific data with regional partners as a first step towards our existing conservation measures.

Madam President,

Mauritius has established 18 Marine Protected Areas within our territory, which currently account for 9.4% of the coastal area under protection. Mauritius is committed to creating a new MPA in the Chagos Archipelago which has been recognised by the ICJ, the United Nations and ITLOS to be an integral part of Mauritius. This MPA will allow Mauritius to fulfil our commitment to protect at least 30% of our maritime zone by 2030. It will also aim at preserving traditional resource management methods, cultural values, traditional knowledge and cultural heritage while allowing for the resettlement

of the forcibly displaced Chagossians and the decolonization of Mauritius as provided for in UNGA resolution 73/295.

We invite Member States, NGOs, scientific institutions and other stakeholders to join us in this venture, which will be the world's first of its kind.

I thank you for your attention.