



Statement

UN Ocean Conference 2022 Lisbon, Portugal

“Scaling up ocean action based on science and innovation for the implementation of Goal 14: stocktaking, partnerships and solutions”.

Thank you madam president, Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen

South Africa aligns itself with the statements of the Africa Group as well as of the G77 and China.

We are grateful to Portugal and Kenya for co-hosting this important meeting, in the beautiful city of Lisbon.

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen

The triple planetary crisis which confronts us, encompassing destruction of nature, increasing pollution, and the climate crisis is one of the most serious threats we confront. Driven by unsustainable production and consumption, this crisis is negatively impacting all ecosystems and life on our planet, including the world’s magnificent oceans and the abundance of life these harbour and support.

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen

South Africa is a country where three of the world’s oceans meet, the South Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean and the Southern Ocean, and we are endowed with a magnificent, world-famous coastline that is home to a plethora of unique species.

Our oceans also support many millions of livelihoods as well as important industries, including tourism. In our mission to address poverty and unemployment, the South African Government is finalizing a masterplan for the blue economy, as a potential driver of growth and development.

In so doing, however, we have concurrently enacted strong measures to conserve our ocean and coastal biodiversity, taking active measures to address SDG14. Allow me to provide some examples of these efforts:

On Goal 14.1 on preventing and reducing marine pollution by 2025 our Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DFFE) is leading projects together with partners, communities and the private sector aimed at addressing plastic pollution that enters rivers and eventually oceans at their sources on land. These efforts have also contributed towards Sustainable Development Goal 6.3 to improve water quality by 2030 through reducing pollution.

South Africa has also enacted strong measures to conserve our ocean and coastal biodiversity. We are a signatory to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and currently have 15 and a half percent of our marine and coastal waters under protection, offering support to 90% of our marine eco-system.

We have also incorporated ecosystem approaches into our relevant legislation.

As you may recall, the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) had already committed States to “promote the conservation and management of oceans” including through taking action to develop and “facilitate the use of diverse approaches and tools, including the ecosystem approach”. This also included “the establishment of marine protected areas consistent with international law and a representative network of Marine Protected Areas in areas within and beyond national jurisdiction by 2012”.¹

While much progress has been made in areas within national jurisdiction, especially Exclusive Economic Zones, little progress has been recorded in the high seas. The reason for the little progress in high seas is obvious: while the UN Convention specifies relevant authority for all other maritime zones (*territorial waters, exclusive economic zone, continental shelf and the seabed*)

there is no overarching authority with competence to regulate matters on the high seas. This challenge has prompted the need for the elaboration of a BBNJ legally binding instrument which establishes a global process for the establishment of marine protected areas along with other

¹ Paragraph 32(c) of the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

conservation measures which will be universally binding. The South African delegation is highly involved in the BBNJ negotiations which shall be finalised in the last and final Fifth Session of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC5) scheduled for August 2022. The time has come to conclude these BBNJ negotiations.

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen

The tragedy affecting our oceans reaffirms the importance of an urgent, multilateral solution to the climate crisis through the UNFCCC, which ensures that developing countries are not unfairly disadvantaged in their development. Meeting and surpassing climate financing targets, as well as developed countries honoring commitments in this regard is critical. So too is urgent provision of technological support and capacity-building to developing countries, and the upholding of the UNFCCC's core principles of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC) in all of our multilateral climate change related efforts.

South Africa is deeply committed to fighting climate change and has made ambitious commitments in this regard which we are steadily implementing. We look forward to participating in COP27 in Egypt later in the year to further advance the climate agenda, with an important focus on Africa.

The role of science and innovation is also critical, offering the possibility through technology to address many of the challenges that confront the oceans. We echo calls by the African Group for an open "exchange of technical capacities and scientific research to generate and disseminate evidence-based knowledge and information on advancing the sustainable blue economy."

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen

In conclusion, we have a unique opportunity at this conference to quite literally reverse the tide on the very serious crisis confronting our oceans. We also have a comprehensive blueprint for action, in the form of SDG14. What is left is to seize the opportunity we have here to redouble our resolve, commitment, efforts and commensurate resources towards this critical goal.

I thank you.