

National Statement

Attributed to: Her Excellency Mariam bint Mohammed Almheiri
Minister of Climate Change and Environment

Event: Opening Plenary Session at UN Ocean Conference (UNOC)

Venue: Altice Arena, Lisbon, Portugal

Date: Monday, June 27, 2022

Time: 10am-1pm

Duration: 5 minutes

Brief: Co-hosted by the governments of Kenya and Portugal, UNOC seeks to drive the development of much-needed science-based innovative solutions aimed at starting a new chapter of global ocean action to support the implementation of SDG 14: Life Below Water. The conference will take place under the theme 'Scaling up ocean action based on science and innovation for the implementation of Goal 14: stocktaking, partnerships and solutions'. The sessions will address the threats to health, ecology, economy, and governance of the oceans – acidification, marine litter and pollution, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and the loss of habitats and biodiversity.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Fatema and I am giving this speech on behalf of Her Excellency Mariam Almheiri, the UAE's Minister of Climate Change and Environment. She is a big advocate for youth empowerment and has asked me to give her speech on her behalf.

- It's a pleasure to join you today with my other youth colleagues. I extend my sincere gratitude to the governments of Kenya and Portugal for hosting this important event that comes at a crucial time for ocean conservation.

- In the United Arab Emirates, we are proactively working to protect our marine and coastal environment and preserve its vital ecosystem services in line with our commitment to implementing SDG 14.
- We have stepped up our efforts to safeguard our aquatic resources through adopting diverse measures. These include expanding our network of marine protected areas, implementing fishing regulations, developing the aquaculture industry, combating marine pollution, and rehabilitating degraded marine ecosystems.
- We have already reached SDG Target 14.5 on conserving at least 10 percent of coastal and marine areas by 2020.
- We have 16 marine protected areas that account for 12 percent of our marine and coastal territory, which means we have also achieved Aichi Target 11.
- Some of our marine protected areas have received international recognition. These include six Ramsar sites, five Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas, and one UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.
- We have also reached SDG Target 14.2 that required us to implement measures to sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, and take action for their restoration by 2020.

- We evaluate the management effectiveness of our protected areas every two years using the standard Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool – METT. During our latest evaluation in 2020, we scored 71 percent, which is well above the global average of 53 percent. The process for 2022 is ongoing.
- Our current focus is on the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of our blue carbon ecosystems, especially mangrove forests, coral reefs, and seagrass meadows.
- We are here to talk about actions and so let me share with you some concrete actions that the UAE is undertaking:
 - Understanding the importance of mangroves which we are all aware of, the UAE is planting 100 million ADDITIONAL Mangroves in the UAE by 2030.... this is 70 million more mangrove trees than outlined in our second Nationally Determined Contribution.
 - We are rehabilitating degraded marine ecosystems by restoring coral reefs, which serve as natural habitats and multi-dimensional community structures for multiple marine species.
 - To date, we have deployed more than 5,000 artificial reefs, and are developing the world's largest coral nursery that will span around 300,000 square meters and will be home to 1.5 million corals.

- We have also invested and are dedicated to building a sustainable aquaculture industry through leveraging state-of-the-art technologies to breed fish in a sustainable manner in the middle of the desert.
- We also implemented policies to cut down on the amount of single-use plastics and eventually eliminate them altogether in the coming months. Abu Dhabi for example has now implemented a complete ban on single use plastics as of 1st of June.
- Finally, as we want to catalyze a sustainable blue economy, we are currently establishing the Marine innovation park in the UAE as a center of excellence in marine science and research which will be ready at the end of this year and so we invite you all to reach out to us and partner with us to drive sustainable blue projects and attract more investments in this field.
- All these efforts have resulted in the UAE ranking first in the Arab region and Asia and 14th worldwide in the Ocean Health Index 2021. We have also maintained a global leadership in the Marine Protected Areas category of the Environmental Performance Index. We are proud of these achievements but also know that there is still so much more to do....

- and so the UAE looks forward to seeing you all in Egypt at COP27 and then welcoming the world to COP28 in 2023. We are committed and keen to work with all of you to drive collective efforts to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change on the marine environment worldwide.

Because if we want to preserve our oceans for the next generations, we need accelerated actions,

We need partnerships, we need system-wide transformation, and we need all hands on deck.

Thank you.