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Delivered on behalf of Heirs to Our Ocean

Longer statement (up to 700 words) to be published on the event’s page

Heirs to Our Ocean, an official Ocean Decade implementation partner, emphasizes that education systems worldwide are failing to prepare youth for real-world challenges, including ocean, climate, and humanitarian crises. UN convenings addressing these issues must prioritize real-world education, focusing on the science of human impact on ecosystems and essential skills such as empathy and collaboration.

However, beyond education reform, it is crucial that youth are given a meaningful seat at the table in all UN Ocean Conferences. We call for lowering the minimum age for attendance at these conferences to include younger advocates, fostering early leadership in environmental conservation. Additionally, dedicating a set number of seats specifically for youth will ensure that our voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes.

Heirs to Our Ocean has developed a toolkit, "Guide to Organizing a Youth Advisory Council for the UN Ocean Decade," to assist UN Member States and inspire youth in forming Youth Advisory Councils (YACs) for the UNOD. Our goal is to ensure other countries meaningfully engage their youth in the Ocean Decade, recognizing the critical importance of this period for the future of ocean health and global climate action.

Young people today face a multitude of challenges, not only as the inheritors of environmental degradation but also as the next generation of decision-makers who will shape the policies and actions that will determine the future health of our planet. They must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to participate meaningfully in these processes. This
requires a concerted effort to reform educational systems worldwide to better prepare youth for the real-world environmental challenges they will face.

At Heirs to Our Ocean, we have witnessed firsthand the power of informed and engaged youth. Our organization has been instrumental in providing education and advocacy opportunities for young people, fostering a deep understanding of human impacts on oceans and waterways. We have seen how empowered youth can drive change, and we believe that their involvement is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 14, which focuses on life below water.

Lowering the minimum age for attendance at UN Ocean Conferences is a crucial step, to meaningfully engaging youth. Currently, many young advocates are excluded from these important forums due to age restrictions. By allowing younger participants, we can nurture early leadership and ensure that the voices of those who will be most affected by today’s decisions are heard. Dedicated seats for youth at these conferences will further guarantee that their perspectives are integrated into the decision-making process.

The Ocean Decade presents a unique opportunity to make significant strides in ocean conservation and climate action. However, achieving these goals requires the collective efforts of all generations. Youth have the passion, creativity, and determination to drive change, but they need the support and opportunities to do so effectively. By prioritizing quality education, integrating youth into the Communities of Ocean Action, and ensuring their participation in all UN Ocean Conferences, we can create a sustainable and thriving future for our oceans and our planet.