

PGA speech (delivered by PGA)

Preparatory Meeting for the 2025 UN Oceans Conference

Tuesday, 2 July 2024, 10 am, Trusteeship Council Chamber

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the President, and indeed on my own behalf, it is a great pleasure to welcome you to today's preparatory meeting – ahead of the **Third UN Ocean Conference**, with its crucial theme: *“Accelerating Action and Mobilizing All Actors to Conserve and Sustainably Use the Ocean.”*

I thank the co-hosts of the Conference – France and Costa Rica – for co-chairing this meeting and their comprehensive overview of our objectives for today's deliberations.

Excellencies,

Without the oceans, Earth would be just another barren, rocky planet orbiting the sun.

Life originated in the oceans – which cover **more than 70 percent of the Earth's surface** and have played a crucial role for all living creatures over centuries.

These vast bodies of water are responsible for much of our planet's biodiversity.

Even today, the oceans continue to profoundly influence our weather patterns – acting as the world’s largest carbon dioxide sink, and providing daily subsistence for **over 35% of the global population**; a dependency particularly acute in developing countries.

Despite their importance, our oceans are in a state of emergency – under immense pressure from the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

The ongoing deterioration of the ocean is marked by rising sea levels, frequent extreme weather events, marine heatwaves, reef degradation, ocean acidification, plastic pollution, unregulated fishing practices, and destructive seabed extractive activities.

Collectively, these issues pose severe threats to our marine resources, food security and livelihoods.

To a varying degree on the extend of contributing to the crisis, we nonetheless hold a shared responsibility – a collective obligation – to manage the ocean’s resources sustainably, preserving them as a vital legacy for future generations.

Therefore, I am encouraged to see that the agreement on the **Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)** has been finalized – and the General Assembly has established a

preparatory commission, which met last week, to prepare for its entry into force.

Furthermore, the negotiations on a legally binding treaty on plastic pollution are proceeding well. This treaty is of critical importance if we are to significantly improve the health and sustainability of our oceans.

Excellencies,

The **Third UN Ocean Conference** in Nice, France, next June will aim to tackle these challenges by identifying ways to support the implementation of **SDG 14** and leveraging its interlinkages with other Goals pertaining to ocean action.

Hopefully, this timely Conference will build on the momentum we aspire to generate later this year during the General Assembly's **high-level Meeting on sea-level rise**, as well as during the **Summit of the Future**, both in September – with the broader goal of reinvigorating our multilateral system.

It is important to continue building on existing instruments to forge productive partnerships that contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean.

I highlight that **Small Island Developing States (SIDS)** have been at the forefront of advancing conversations on ocean action

– remaining highly active within the UN system and multilateral fora, and demonstrating commendable global leadership.

This was exemplified recently when nine small island states – led by Antigua and Barbuda and Tuvalu – **successfully brought a case to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea**, which ruled that carbon emissions can be considered a sea pollutant.

This historic ruling obliges countries to mitigate their effects on oceans, potentially creating an important basis for future climate jurisprudence.

Its practical weight was recently reflected at the **Fourth International Conference on SIDS** – which I had the privilege of attending in May.

At this conference, world leaders adopted the **Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS)** – addressing various aspects of ocean health, from conservation and sustainable use of marine resources to biodiversity loss and plastic pollution.

Excellencies,

I end by making a call upon all of us to undertake coordinated conservation efforts to maintain and restore ocean health.

We must expedite the implementation of the first and second Ocean Conference voluntary commitments – ranging from protecting marine areas and investing in ocean renewable energies, to banning single-use plastics and supporting enhanced scientific cooperation.

I further call on Member States to present new and more ambitious commitments during the upcoming **2025 UN Ocean Conference**.

This moment provides us with a platform to reflect, once more, on the progress made and the challenges to create pathways forward.

As we consider the proposed themes of the Ocean Action Panels and deliberate on possible elements of the declaration, I urge you all to work in a spirit of collaboration and compromise to save the oceans.

In line with this sentiment, I also urge Member States to fully support the two co-facilitators appointed by the President – Their Excellencies Tania Serafim Yvonne Romualdo and James Martin Larsen, Permanent Representatives of Cabo Verde and Australia, respectively, who are already making outstanding efforts.

The President and OPGA team stand ready to assist you throughout these efforts.

I am confident that together, we can achieve SDG 14.

I wish you all constructive discussions ahead.

I thank you.