

Preparatory meeting for the 2025 UN Ocean Conference

Statement by Mr. Serpa Soares, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel; Special Adviser to the Presidents of the Conference on oceans and legal matters

Tuesday, 2 July 2024, 10 a.m., Trusteeship Council Chamber

President of the General Assembly,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to deliver this statement today, at the opening of the Preparatory Meeting for the 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources (“2025 UN Ocean Conference”), on behalf of Mr. Serpa Soares, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel.

Allow me to convey his greetings; he regrets of not being able to attend this Preparatory Meeting due to other commitments of importance.

As special adviser to the Presidents of the Conference, France and Costa-Rica, on oceans and legal matters, Mr. Serpa Soares has worked together with Mr. Li JUNHUA, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, in his capacity as the Secretary-General of the Conference, by providing all necessary assistance in the substantive preparations for the Conference.

Under Mr. Serpa Soares leadership, the Office of Legal Affairs, including through the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea and the Office of the Legal Counsel, collaborates closely with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which serves as the Secretariat of the Conference, in the preparations for the 2025 Conference. That included, among other things, working together on the preparation of the draft background note of the Secretary-General for this meeting.

The contribution of the Office of Legal Affairs also extends to the many initiatives taken by the United Nations Legal Counsel, including in his role as focal point for UN-Oceans, to strengthen and promote inter-agency cooperation and coordination of the

United Nations system and making sure that that United Nations agencies deliver as one in the efficient preparation and successful outcomes of the third United Nations Ocean Conference.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

The past few years since the *2022 United Nations Ocean Conference* have been marked by significant developments in the legal field, confirming, as the General Assembly reaffirms on an annual basis, that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea sets out the legal framework within which all activities and seas must be carried out, including for the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and its resources.

Advancing international law as reflected in the Convention is important not only for achieving target 14.c but also for promoting integrated and cooperative efforts to reach all the targets of Goal 14.

Allow me to highlight some of the recent benchmark achievements.

The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (“BBNJ Agreement”), has now become the third implementing agreement to the Convention.

Its adoption, by consensus, after nearly two decades of negotiations, represents a great victory for the ocean and multilateralism.

The Preparatory Commission established by resolution 78/272 to prepare for the entry into force of the BBNJ Agreement and the convening of the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Agreement successfully held its first organizational meeting last week, creating the enabling conditions for the important work ahead.

The swift entry into force and effective implementation of the BBNJ Agreement would make vital contributions to addressing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

They can also significantly contribute to achieving Goal 14 and other ocean-related goals and targets, including those in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, also celebrated as an important step forward in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

A further key development is the historic resolution of the United Nations Environment Assembly on an international legally binding instrument to tackle plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. The process, which is expected to conclude by the end of this year, offers new room for optimism for ocean health and resilience.

All these remarkable achievements in international law must be translated into concrete and urgent action so that they don't become dead letter. And the harm to the marine environment may become irreversible, jeopardizing the well-being of present and future generations.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

The ocean is in a state of emergency. This represents a unique challenge but also an opportunity for the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference. Its overarching theme is self-explanatory in that regard.

Building on the outcomes of the previous two Conferences, the 2025 United Nations Conference can and must explore all possible avenues to accelerate action and mobilize all actors in support of the implementation of Goal 14, as well as of other related Goals and Targets.

The High-Level Event “Immersed in Change” recently held in Costa Rica has been an important stepping stone towards the Conference.

It laid the foundation for a successful 2025 United Nations Conference by reaffirming the political commitment to scale up ocean action.

Mr. Serpa Soares hopes that this meeting will provide the platform for fruitful exchanges to keep the momentum going.