



Statement on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States at the Ocean Action Panels of the Third UN Ocean Conference

9 June | Nice, France

OAP2: Increasing scientific cooperation, knowledge, capacity development, technology, and education to strengthen the science-policy interface for ocean health

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, and colleagues,

I deliver this statement on behalf of the 39 Small Island Developing States (SIDS). **Ocean science is not an academic luxury—it is an existential necessity for SIDS.**

The well-being of our communities, cultures, ecosystems, food security, and livelihoods are dependent on a healthy and thriving Ocean. **We are custodians of over 30% of the Ocean under national jurisdiction.** Ironically, we lack access to the critical data and knowledge systems needed to protect our legacy.

Three years ago, at the last UN Ocean Conference, AOSIS launched a Declaration calling for genuine, equitable partnerships to build capacity in marine science. We outlined eight principles for meaningful partnerships that are co-designed, durable, and treat SIDS as key partners with agency rather than passive beneficiaries. Unfortunately, SIDS continue to be marginalised.

We need accessible information and data on Ocean health so we can make informed decisions about conservation and sustainable use. The data collection must be informed by our needs and made accessible to all. Our research priorities are urgent: understanding the impact of climate change on fisheries, developing climate-resilient maritime infrastructure that integrates traditional knowledge, and advancing sustainable aquaculture systems.

Without this comprehensive, high-quality marine data, small islands are at a great disadvantage in addressing climate-related threats such as rising sea levels, coral bleaching, and biodiversity loss.

The stark disparity is that only 0.3% of all endorsed Ocean Decade Actions are led by SIDS institutions, despite our stewardship of 30% of the Ocean. While 17% of Ocean Decade Actions include capacity development in SIDS countries, this represents participation, not leadership.

The time for marginal change has passed. We demand:

First, capacity-building initiatives based on our needs. The BBNJ Agreement included major provisions on transformative capacity building and technology transfer. Without fundamental shifts in how partnerships are structured, we risk repeating the same patterns of marginalisation.

Second, immediate action to ensure inclusive data access. Ocean observation systems must be recognized as critical infrastructure.

Third, a fundamental rebalancing of Ocean science leadership. We need dedicated funding mechanisms and institutional support to ensure SIDS research institutions can lead initiatives that address our specific challenges.

Fourth, a stronger nexus between science and policy that ensures SIDS perspectives—including traditional and Indigenous knowledge—are integrated into global frameworks from the outset, not as afterthoughts.

SIDS have been leading conversations on the sustainable use of marine resources for a long time. As custodians of vast Ocean areas critical to global sustainability, we stand ready to lead—but we need the tools, data, and partnerships to empower our stewardship of our collective heritage.

SIDS have been the subjects of Ocean research for too long- the observations in datasets, the case studies in reports, and the vulnerable communities in impact assessments. But SIDS are rarely the lead researchers. Rarely the owners of our own Ocean data.

It is time to change that narrative.

Thank you.