

Antigua and Barbuda National Statement UN Ocean Conference 2025 – Nice, France

Delivered by the Honourable Anthony Smith Jr.- Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Lands and the Blue Economy

***Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,***

I bring you warm greetings from Antigua and Barbuda. I thank the co-hosts, Costa Rica and France, for convening this important Conference in beautiful Nice at a time when the ocean is calling for urgent action.

For us, as a Small Island Developing State, the ocean is not just a sector. It is our economy, culture, identity, and increasingly, our front line. From food security and tourism, to climate resilience and community livelihoods, the ocean touches every corner of our lives. And yet, it is under threat, from warming waters, from invasive species, and from pollution.

A year ago, the global community gathered in St. John's, Antigua, for the Fourth International Conference on SIDS. There, we launched the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS, known as the ABAS, a bold new framework that puts ocean action at the heart of sustainable development.

The ABAS is the latest in a series of internationally agreed-upon documents that recognise the centrality of the Ocean to SIDS and its role in sustaining people and the planet. We call on all to uphold the commitments under the ABAS. Commitments representing the international community's collective pledge to support our efforts as SIDS to achieve sustainable development. It is not just a framework for development; it is our framework, charting our course towards resilient prosperity.

Now, our focus is clear: implementation.

First, we are investing in the blue economy of the future. Through the University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus, we have established a Centre of Excellence for Oceanography and the Blue Economy. This Centre will lead research, innovation, and skills development for the Caribbean and SIDS ensuring that our people are at the helm of ocean governance. For Antigua and Barbuda, the Blue Economy presents a transformative opportunity to harness the vast potential of our vast ocean territory.

Second,
We are stepping up the fight against plastic pollution.

Antigua and Barbuda was one of the first countries in the world to ban single-use plastics. Today, we proudly serve as Vice Presidents of the global committee negotiating a treaty to end plastic pollution.

This treaty must be ambitious.

It must cover the full lifecycle of plastics.

It must also provide real support to countries like mine, which are doing the right thing, often with limited resources.

Third, we are committed to building sustainable fisheries.

Fisheries are the lifeblood of our food systems and coastal communities.

We are investing in stronger enforcement and sustainable practices.

However, we continue to face serious challenges, particularly from illegal and unregulated fishing.

We call on our partners to help strengthen traceability, governance, and market access for small-scale fishers in SIDS.

We are also actively participating in several multilateral forums related to SDG14, UNFCCC COP, the Convention on Biodiversity and recently became the 21st country to ratify the BBNJ Agreement.

Regarding the BBNJ, we recognise and welcome the growing momentum towards entry to force and look forward to the critical threshold of 60 ratifications.

Full implementation of the BBNJ Agreement will also progress critical work towards equity through access and benefits sharing and capacity building for Antigua and Barbuda.

But colleagues, let's be clear: islands cannot do this alone.

We are facing a climate-ocean crisis.

Rising seas, acidifying waters, and warming oceans are already impacting our coasts, our corals, and our catches.

And it is Small Island Developing States, like Antigua and Barbuda, that are feeling the heaviest blow.

That is why we are calling for scaled-up, predictable support, for finance, for marine technology, and long-term capacity development.

The current system forces vulnerable nations to navigate fragmented financing streams. These finance streams must ensure true additionality of finance, prevent double-counting and maximise the impact of limited resources

We don't need charity.

We need partnership.

We need urgent action.

Antigua and Barbuda stands ready to do our part.

We invite collaboration. We welcome investment.

And we call on all of you to stand with SIDS as we fight for a healthier, more resilient ocean.
Let this be the moment when we move from promise to delivery
and from commitments to real change.

I thank you.