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The Central Arctic Ocean, the frozen ocean, is all-too-often forgotten in ocean dialogue. Part XII of the Convention sets out clear obligations for Parties to preserve and protect the marine environment, reaffirmed in the ITLOS Advisory Opinion in Case No. 31 of 21 May 2024. Drawing on these obligations, and aiming to align disparate legal instruments to serve their intended purpose of environmental preservation, GlobalChoices is calling for a minimum 10-year Moratorium on Exploitative Activities in the Central Arctic Ocean (CAO) beyond national jurisdiction.

This precautionary principle pause aims to preempt harm to the CAO, create a model for effective governance, and safeguard this biome, which needs protection regardless of melting ice. The proposal calls for a 10-year pause on activities of increasing interest as the sea-ice melts, including fossil-fuel exploitation, deep-sea mining, and transpolar-shipping. These activities would pollute the marine environment, particularly impacting Indigenous Peoples who have stewarded the oceans for millennia. CAO ice loss will also be felt far beyond its boundaries, resulting in global chain reactions including sea level rise, ocean acidification, and extreme-weather events.

To enhance conservation, it is imperative to prioritise the precautionary approach – such as in the BBNJ Agreement. States' environmental obligations are divided amongst legal regimes. Successfully implementing international law as reflected in the Convention requires not only thinking about the Convention but also legal regime interaction. When instruments address related issues, they must be applied coherently to ocean spaces that have thus far not been duly protected. In leading the drafting of the 10-year Moratorium, GlobalChoices has taken the opportunity to bring together obligations across the marine, climate, biodiversity, human health, and human rights regimes, applying them specifically to the CAO. Recognising the importance of a flourishing CAO to global ecosystems, we urge our colleagues to implement international law innovatively and cross-sectorally.