



**Plenary Statement by Mr. M.R. Hassen, Director General, Ocean Affairs,
Environment and Climate Change, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign
Employment and Tourism, Sri Lanka**

Third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3)

Nice, France 9-13 June 2025

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor for Sri Lanka to join this important gathering organized by the United Nations in the beautiful city of Nice. Government of Sri Lanka extends its sincere appreciation to France and Costa Rica for their leadership in convening this high-level Ocean Conference at a time when multilateral ocean governance stands at a critical inflection point.

Today, as the global community seeks to chart a sustainable and inclusive path forward for our oceans, Sri Lanka stands in full solidarity with the shared vision enshrined in SDG 14: to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.

As an island nation, the ocean is our lifeblood. We are deeply committed to the sustainable use of its resources, responsible ocean governance, and the protection of marine biodiversity as part of the common heritage of humanity. Over 32% of our population lives along the coast, and 80% of our tourism and fisheries economy depends on healthy marine ecosystems. Our response is a bold and integrated "Ridge to Reef" approach bridging land, coast, and ocean governance to reduce disaster risk, protect biodiversity, and enhance blue value chains.

Sri Lanka is deeply committed to advancing ocean health and governance through strong partnerships with bilateral and multilateral stakeholders. We actively promote sustainable blue investments, supported by strategic frameworks like our Marine Investment Plan and Climate Finance Strategy, to balance economic growth with environmental protection. Enhancing maritime safety and security remains a priority, with improved vessel tracking, legal reforms against illegal fishing, and regional cooperation through initiatives such as the Regional Centre for Maritime Security, established with support from the Government of France. Our leadership in conservation is reflected in international recognition for mangrove restoration and our efforts to champion the protection of seagrass and other critical marine ecosystems. In this context, Sri Lanka reaffirms its unwavering commitment to global ocean governance under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Paris Agreement, the Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Copenhagen Declaration. These frameworks guide our national vision for sustainable marine development, climate resilience, and ocean justice.

As the current Chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Sri Lanka is championing a cooperative regional approach to ocean governance.

Excellencies,

The challenges we face in ocean health and governance are immense, with trans-boundary marine pollution an insidious threat that transcends borders and jurisdictions. Plastic pollution has emerged as a critical priority in INC 5.2 negotiations for a global treaty. We support a binding treaty covering its full life cycle to protect marine ecosystems and livelihoods. Developing countries, often unfairly burdened, must receive fair funding, technology, and accountability.

Indeed the governance of seabed mining poses a growing challenge as interest in deep-sea resources accelerates. Without strong safeguards, extraction risks irreversible harm to fragile marine ecosystems. A fair and sustainable approach is not just desirable, but imperative. Equitable access to ocean resources, the protection of marine biodiversity,

and the integrity of multilateral processes must be non-negotiable. Ocean governance and maritime entitlements must be driven by science and technology.

Joining the global efforts for ocean biodiversity conservation, Sri Lanka signed the BBNJ Agreement (Biodiversity beyond National Jurisdiction) in February 2025, becoming its 109th signatory. We are now in the process of domestic ratification and harmonizing of our legislation to turn commitments into concrete action. The BBNJ process is crucial for developing coastal states and SIDS to close capability gaps and ensure fair access to marine genetic resources and benefit-sharing, making swift action on capacity building and technology transfer imperative.

In Closing, we thank our key partners UNDP, UNODC, GCF, GEF, IMO, & other collaborators for their steadfast support. Together, let us secure a sustainable, inclusive, and ocean economy for present and future generations.

Thank you.