

**STATEMENT BY MR. PAULA MA‘U
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HEAD OF DELEGATION OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA
AT THE THIRD UNITED NATIONS OCEAN CONFERENCE**

11 JUNE 2025, NICE, FRANCE

Check Against Delivery

Co-Chairs,

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the Governments of France, and Costa Rica for their outstanding preparations for, and hosting of, the Third United Nations Ocean Conference, as well as to the United Nations Secretariat for its arrangements. We are delighted to be here among this esteemed gathering, as global champions committed to the well-being of our ocean, people and planet.

We depend on a healthy and resilient ocean and welcome the overarching theme for this conference “Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean”. The theme is timely and calls on us all to act faster and work together towards a healthy and resilient ocean.

Co-Chairs,

The Kingdom of Tonga, despite being a small island developing State, is also a big ocean state. As a big ocean state, it is essential that we protect and conserve our ocean space for generations of Tongans to come.

With this goal in mind, the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga coordinates ocean activities through a specialized committee known as the Ocean 7. It is a cross-sectoral coordinating and joint planning mechanism.

The Kingdom of Tonga **is pleased to share that we have effectively fulfilled our voluntary commitment announced at the UNOC meeting in 2017, establishing 30% marine protected area, no take zones within our EEZ, aligning with the objectives outlined in SDG14, while also ensuring the 100% sustainably managed of all designated regions.** This is part of Tonga's sustainable ocean and marine spatial planning and integrated ocean management efforts.

Co-Chairs,

Permit me to quickly provide an update on 8 key initiatives the Kingdom of Tonga is undertaking in line with the theme this year:

- First, we are developing a National Integrated Ocean Policy and Planning process, the harmonization of ocean-related legislation, and progressing the Ocean Management Bill through Parliament.
- Second, we have also developed the Tonga Ocean Management Plan for implementation – to 100% sustainably manage 700,000 square kilometres of our EEZ;
- Third, we are moving towards Climate and Biodiversity-Smart Marine Spatial Planning and developing Ocean Accounts, as part of our integrated ocean governance and management efforts recognising the nexus between ocean-climate and energy, One Health, and Food Systems – in order to sustainably harness our Blue Economy.
- Fourth, we are developing our Blue Economy Strategy across sectors including fisheries & aquaculture, tourism, maritime transport & ports, as

well as emerging blue economy sectors of ocean-based renewables, nature-based solutions, amongst other initiatives, including exploring innovative blue finance;

- Fifth, Tonga has acceded to the Agreement on Port State Measures;
- Sixth, Tonga supports strategies for net zero GHG Emissions from shipping;
- Seventh, Tonga is mainstreaming ocean literacy in to educational curricular, and strengthening public awareness, from communities, to Cabinet, and beyond; and
- Eighth, Tonga is also establishing an Ocean Trust Fund to support implementation of our activities, and we welcome donor support for this effort.

Co-Chairs,

Tonga officially signed the BBNJ Agreement in 2023, and is dedicated to ratifying the Agreement once our internal processes are complete. We congratulate all countries that have led the way thus far with ratification. We remain committed to the work of the Preparatory Commission.

Tonga recognizes the alignment between the Blue and Green Economies and believe that the new BBNJ Agreement will harness its potential. This is most critical in the areas of:

- Firstly, climate change mitigation through the development an effective network of biodiversity and climate-smart marine protected areas in the high seas; and
- Secondly, the decarbonization of maritime transport, and renewable energy.

Through the ratification of the BBNJ Agreement, we will actively participate in its processes and advocate for other Parties to follow suit. We can promote cooperation across borders to ensure strong maritime security, compliance, and enforcement measures at national, regional, and global levels.

Co-Chairs,

Tonga and other Pacific Island Countries have emphasized the importance of setting ambitious goals during the negotiations for the new global plastics treaty. We do not manufacture plastic materials or products, but face considerable challenges in managing plastics at its end of life. We will rely on the new plastics instrument to harmonise and strengthen upstream measures within the full life plastics life cycle, particularly on the sustainable design of plastics. In this regard, Tonga acknowledges the urgent need to conclude the Global Plastic treaty.

Co-Chairs,

The Kingdom of Tonga recognizes not only the the interconnectivity between natural and economic ecosystems, but also the importance of understanding the interaction between governance instruments, frameworks, and bodies. And we urge stronger coherence, cooperation, coordination, and collaboration in this regard.

Co-Chairs,

Climate change and its impacts continue to threaten the existence and livelihood of our nation. Accelerating action and commitments under the Paris Agreement remain a priority for Tonga. To have a Conference of the Party of the UNFCCC in the Pacific region – who are at the frontlines of the climate crisis, and leading on climate science, solutions and advocacy, is timely. In this regard we fully support Australia's bid to host COP31.

Co – Chairs,

Sea-level rise remains a threat to all. We reiterate the 2021 Pacific Islands Forum Declaration on the Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change Related Sea-Level Rise, and the 2023 Pacific Islands Forum Declaration on the Continuity of Statehood and the Protection of Persons in the Face of Climate Change Related Sea-Level Rise. We also welcome the recent report of the International Law Commission on the topic.

Co-Chairs,

Let me close by thanking all our partners: past, present, and of course, future. Genuine partnerships are key for the scaling up of actions that align with our collective vision for a resilient and prosperous ocean, people, and planet. We are stronger, together.

Malo 'aupito, Merci boucoup, I thank you.