

## Statement – Ocean Action Panel 4: Tackling Marine Pollution and Preventing Ocean Degradation

Excellencies, colleagues,

Marine pollution is one of the most pervasive and damaging threats to ocean health—and a major obstacle to achieving SDG 14. From plastic waste and agricultural runoff to untreated wastewater and ship-borne pollution, the ocean is facing a crisis of contamination that endangers ecosystems, food security, and livelihoods.

**First**, we must urgently scale up efforts to **prevent pollution at its source**. This requires strengthening national regulatory frameworks, enforcing international conventions, and—critically—investing in foundational infrastructure systems, particularly **waste management and wastewater treatment**. Over 80% of wastewater globally is discharged without adequate treatment. Without functioning sewer networks, treatment plants, and stormwater systems, marine ecosystems will continue to be overloaded with pathogens, nutrients, and chemical pollutants. Solid waste systems must also be improved to prevent terrestrial waste from entering rivers and coasts. UNOPS can support governments in planning and implementing waste and wastewater infrastructure, especially in SIDS and coastal LDCs where vulnerabilities are acute and resources are limited.

**Second**, we need to **strengthen monitoring, data, and enforcement mechanisms**. Many countries lack the systems and tools needed to track pollution flows, assess ecosystem impacts, and prosecute violators. Investments in water quality monitoring, marine litter tracking, and pollution hot-spot mapping are essential. UNOPS can contribute by helping to deploy digital tools, satellite data systems, and monitoring networks that improve transparency and accountability in marine pollution control.

**Third**, the international community must support **circular economy solutions** to ocean plastic and waste. This includes redesigning products and supply chains, supporting sustainable packaging and reuse markets, and building the logistics and recycling infrastructure needed to close material loops. Waste collection, segregation, and reuse systems must be scaled, particularly in urban coastal areas. UNOPS can work with partners to deliver integrated waste management systems that are technically sound, financially viable, and socially inclusive.

**Fourth**, we must address **pollution from maritime transport and port operations**. This includes improving oil spill response capabilities, upgrading port infrastructure to minimize discharges, and enforcing the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) standards. Port reception facilities must be modernized to manage sewage, oily waste, and garbage from ships. UNOPS has experience working on sustainable port infrastructure and can help countries integrate pollution mitigation into port design, retrofitting, and operation.

**Fifth**, tackling marine pollution demands a **whole-of-society approach**. Public awareness, stakeholder participation, and community-led waste and wastewater reduction programs are

vital to shift behaviors and build social ownership of solutions. UNOPS supports governments in designing and delivering programs that are not only technically effective but also socially grounded and scalable.

In summary, pollution is not just an environmental issue—it is a development, health, and justice issue. Addressing it requires practical action, long-term investment, and collaboration across sectors and borders. By investing in waste and wastewater management as a first line of defense, and with the right partnerships and implementation capacity, we can turn the tide on pollution and move decisively toward a cleaner, healthier, and more resilient ocean.

Thank you.