UN Declaration on Sea Level Rise rev4

1 We, the Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives to the opening of the 81st session of the General Assembly, at the High-Level Meeting to enhance action on sea level rise, proclaim this UN Declaration on Sea Level Rise.

2 We are deeply concerned about sea level rise. Sea level rise is not a distant scenario but a real and lived experience for many. Rising sea levels are primarily driven by ocean warming and melting ice sheets and glaciers, and we note with concern this phenomenon is accelerating. It imperils people living on islands and in coastal regions, low-lying deltas and archipelagos around the world, and erodes hard-won development gains, especially for developing countries and in particular, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Its cumulative, severe and irreversible risks demand stronger international cooperation and urgent, coordinated action. Adaptation and mitigation action, based on the best available science and knowledge, is essential to addressing sea level rise.

3 We affirm the need to implement international law in our response to sea level rise, including the law of the sea as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

4 We emphasize the importance of strengthening action to address sea level rise by protecting our shared environment. We emphasize our response to sea level rise should be in accordance with, reinforce and not duplicate or undermine existing applicable legal instruments, processes or mechanisms. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change[1] and the Paris Agreement[2] are the primary international, intergovernmental forums for Parties to those Agreements to negotiate their global response to climate change, and we acknowledge the importance for those Parties to act in accordance with their principles and implement their provisions, and to fulfil the obligations and commitments that each Party has agreed to undertake. We further emphasize that all states, in the exercise of their national sovereignty, may address sea level rise impacts at the national, regional, and international levels.

5 We commend the leadership of SIDS as some of the States most affected in highlighting and aiming to address sea level rise, and take note of the 1989 Malé Declaration on global warming and sea level rise, the 2021 Pacific Islands Forum Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea Level Rise, 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, the 2021 Alliance of Small Island States Leaders' Declaration and the 2024 Alliance of Small Island States Leaders Declaration on Sea Level Rise and Statehood.

Pillar one: Knowledge, data and science

6 Our action must be based on the best available science and knowledge, including the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects and relevant national, regional and international scientific bodies, as appropriate, and where

[1] United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1771, No. 30822

[2] Adopted under the UNFCCC in FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1, decision 1/CP.21

available, traditional knowledge, knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local knowledge systems, while respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and local communities[3]. We commit to further improving the understanding of sea level rise and supporting exchanges and collaboration to accelerate action.

7 We strive to build capacity, enhance science and data research support, foster research collaboration, share data and best practices, develop local science capability and strengthen national institutions, including through technology transfer on mutually agreed terms. We note with appreciation the essential coordination on sea level rise-related data provided by the UN Specialized Agencies, particularly the World Meteorological Organization and the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. We call for improved tools for data coherence and uptake to overcome capacity constraints.

8 We must strengthen disaster risk reduction and build resilience through improved data availability, risk assessments, early warning systems, and long-term planning and adaptation for slow-onset processes. Sea level rise will exacerbate coastal risks, including storm surges and coastal flooding, underscoring the importance of investment and preparedness to build and maintain resilient societies. We will enhance anticipatory action, multi-hazard early warning systems, climate information systems and integrate all-hazard risk assessments into planning and decision-making frameworks as appropriate.

9 We commit to strengthening coordinated scientific observation, data collection and modelling efforts, and call for greater recognition, collaboration and exchange of interoperable, accessible and sustained global data systems, including bathymetric, topographical and sea level data, cryospheric information, in situ observation and remote sensing, including satellite-based observation, and the Global Ocean Observing System and Global Sea Level Observing System.

Pillar two: Adaptation, finance and resilience

10 There is urgent need to safeguard long-term habitability, livelihoods and critical infrastructure, including through enhanced public and private finance in line with relevant legal instruments, intergovernmental decisions and commitments. We emphasize the need for strengthened partnerships and cooperation to mobilise and provide financial, technical and policy support to address sea level rise for developing countries, particularly SIDS and LDCs. We call for scaled-up finance to localise action on sea level rise.

11 We call for expanded access to bilateral, regional and international finance and ensuring timely and predictable disbursement, as well as better coordination and effectiveness. We emphasize the importance of streamlined and simplified procedures and systems across relevant funds, as appropriate, to reduce barriers to access.

12 Nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches are essential to supporting adaptation to sea level rise. Habitat and biodiversity loss caused or exacerbated by sea level rise will disrupt coastal and marine ecosystems and impact marine resources, coastal food systems and fish stocks, particularly in areas already facing environmental stresses, such as harmful algal blooms

[3] Nothing in this declaration shall be interpreted as extending the rights set out in UNDRIP to local communities.

and sargassum. Restoration and protection of mangroves, coral reefs, coastal wetlands, kelp forests and seagrass meadows can strengthen resilience while providing ecosystem services and co-benefits.

13 We recognise the need to integrate sea level rise projections into the planning, design, implementation and maintenance of critical coastal infrastructure to ensure their resilience, including ports, energy, transport, water systems, healthcare facilities, telecommunications, digital infrastructure, and coastal protection measures including land reclamation and elevation.

Pillar three: Livelihoods, socioeconomic challenges, culture and heritage

14 Sea level rise has wide-ranging and multi-dimensional impacts, including floods, loss of land, salinisation of arable land and surface and ground water, coastal erosion, increased risk of waterborne disease and permanent inundation. Aquatic food systems and sustainable ocean-based economic sectors including tourism, transport, insurance markets and coastal infrastructure are experiencing direct, cascading and downstream disruptions. We recognise the need to integrate these risks into social protection and national development planning, as appropriate, as well as the fundamental role of management tools, including sustainable ocean plans, marine spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management in supporting sustainable ocean-based economic growth. We underline the importance of interlinkages between the ocean, climate and biodiversity.

15 We underscore that sea level rise exacerbates natural hazards, disaster risks and vulnerabilities, with implications for the economic, environmental and social aspects of development. For certain populations, it may pose existential threats to their livelihoods, cultures, communities and ways of life. We emphasize the importance of supporting voluntary choices for communities affected by sea level rise and mobility with dignity, in agreement with relevant States where it involves international movement and consistent with international law.

16 We stress our responses should ensure all people, including women and girls, children and youth, persons with disabilities, people in vulnerable situations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities are fully and meaningfully empowered and included in decision-making as appropriate. We call on States to promote awareness and education campaigns at local, national, regional and international levels to inform the public about sea level rise and its causes, as appropriate.

17 Sea level rise impacts culture and cultural heritage, including the loss of access to physical sites, living heritage, traditional lands, burial grounds, underwater cultural heritage, archaeological and sacred sites, and culturally significant coastal landscapes. Protection, preservation and documentation of cultural heritage is a priority, including through digitisation.

Pillar four: Legal dimensions of sea level rise

18 International law provides the foundation for action on sea level rise, and we underscore the need for legal stability, certainty, and predictability.

19 We note the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change, including in relation to sea level rise, as well as the final report of

the Study Group of the International Law Commission on “Sea-level rise in relation to international law” and its valuable contribution to enhancing the understanding and clarification of issues of international law arising in connection with sea level rise.

20 We stress the need for stability of maritime zones in response to physical changes resulting from sea level rise. Once established in accordance with UNCLOS, we affirm that States can accordingly maintain their maritime zones in the face of physical changes resulting from sea level rise, without prejudice to the State’s ability to update them. We encourage the provision of relevant technical support to assist States to finalise their baselines under UNCLOS.

21 We recall that once a State is established, the disappearance of one of its constituent elements would not necessarily entail the loss of its statehood. We affirm the presumption in favour of continued statehood and in this respect we underscore the continuity of statehood in the face of sea level rise, as well as sovereignty, sovereign rights and responsibilities, and membership of the United Nations of such States, consistent with international law. We call for international support for States facing land territory changes due to sea level rise to continue to maintain institutional functions.

22 In the context of the protection of persons affected by sea level rise, we emphasize the need for States to respect, protect and fulfill human rights. We also encourage strengthened international cooperation to assist persons affected by sea level rise.

Implementation and review

23 Sea level rise is a global issue and common concern of humankind. We emphasize the importance of coherence and complementarity between intergovernmental processes, fora and organisations within their respective competencies. We call for strengthening multilateral cooperation, system-wide coordination, including by leveraging relevant specialised agencies, funds and programmes, and enhancing coherence to strengthen the effectiveness and delivery of the UN system.

24 We encourage ongoing dialogue on sea level rise at the highest possible level and aim to implement practical follow-up and review. We encourage the mainstreaming of sea level rise into all relevant processes as appropriate. We decide to convene a further high-level meeting on sea level rise before the end of the eighty-fourth session of the General Assembly, the scope and modalities of which shall be decided no later than at the eighty-third session of the General Assembly.