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**Statement by the Vice Prime Minister for Foreign and  
European Affairs Mr Didier Reynders**

**Dialogue on marine litter  
5 June 2017, New York**

Thank you for giving me the floor, Mr President / Madam President.

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Belgium too is very concerned about marine pollution and marine litter in particular.

We can act in response to these threats. In this regard, I would like to share with you some concrete examples. .

Belgium has drawn up a federal action plan to combat marine litter. It has been included in the list of voluntary commitments of this Conference. The plan has a wide scope and is aimed at preventing macro and micro waste from marine and terrestrial sources. The plan, which has the ambition to be both practical and concrete, aims to facilitate and finance the cleaning of beaches and wrecks. It focuses on awareness raising among the general public, educating professionals in the marine sector, in particular fishermen, and on the circular economy.

Research into marine litter also plays an important role in this plan.

Belgium has also joined the Global Ghost Gear Initiative and has decided to provide financial support for a project to combat ghost fishing gear in the Pacific Ocean.

Collaboration between the different levels of power of the Belgian Federal State is an essential pillar of this action plan. The Flemish Region has already set the goal of reducing waste in the marine environment by up to 75% by 2025 and is also working to improve its facilities for the reception and treatment of port waste. Regarding land-based sources, the Walloon Region has, for more than a year, drastically regulated the use of disposable plastic bags. The Brussels Region is also committed to this goal.

Combating marine pollution can also be achieved through innovative approaches. Many Belgian startups have very well understood this new state of mind and many of them already put new products and services on the market. For example, the Sea2See startup harvests and recycles marine plastic and transforms it into frames for reading or sun glasses. Our universities also bring a great deal of innovation. The University of Ghent is a world leader in assessing eco-toxicological risks of microplastics, especially for public health. The University of Liège, for its part, is involved in the Global Ocean Oxygen Network (GO2NE) project, which improves the global science of oxygen in seas and oceans in order to preserve the health of the oceans and human well-being.

In the cosmetics industry, a sectoral agreement aims to replace by 2020 the microbeads found in, among other things, scrubs and tooth paste.

Finally, international cooperation plays a particularly important role in the fight against marine pollution: this is achieved both by general and global measures and by transfer of specific know-how or technology to the attention, among others, of small island states, which are sometimes disproportionately affected by these marine pollution issues.

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The oceans have no borders. It is through collective action and interdisciplinary and multi-stakeholder alliances that we will find effective and sustainable solutions for all.

Let us ensure that this first World Ocean Conference can stimulate all of us to implement SDG14 and protect life under water!

Thank you.