

Statement by the Head of the South African Delegation,

Dr Edna Molewa, Minister of Environmental Affairs,

On the Occasion of the United Nations Conference to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (Ocean Conference),

From 5-9 June 2017

at the United Nations Headquarters in NEW YORK

6 JUNE 2017: 10:00-13 :00

The theme of the Conference is “Our oceans, our future: partnering for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14”.

The Sustainable Development Goal 14 commits world leaders to "conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development." The Conference theme is most relevant given the responsibility inherent to achieve this goal. There is high accelerated economic activity in and around oceans, increasing population moving towards the oceans, increasing consumption of marine resources, as well as a growing need for new resources, energy and minerals.

South Africa has earmarked the ocean to promote economic growth and to boost job creation in line with the National Development Plan.

We have an ocean space that is greater than our land territory, with the land size of 1.2 mil km² and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 1.5 mil km², and the extended continental shelf claim will double the size of this ocean geographic extent. The implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 is key in addressing these ever-increasing global environmental challenges of our times and re-commits the international community to a strengthened global partnership, given the necessary means of implementation, to secure a sustainable future.

Who are we?

South Africa has an advantage by virtue of its geographical positioning. We are bordered by the cold Benguela current in the west.

Along the East is the warm Agulhas current. Globally, the Agulhas Current provides a key pathway of heat and salt from the Indian Ocean into the South Atlantic, which is then transported equatorward. This distribution of heat and salt in the oceans due to the thermohaline circulation, is what regulates our climate, both locally and globally. Between the Agulhas and Benguela current regions we have the Agulhas bank which is a diverse marine area where these two currents meet and interconnect - indeed a unique oceanographic position. This presents an excellent opportunity for marine scientific research in the region.

These bases are serviced by our state-of-the-art polar research and supply vessel, SA Agulhas 2. Research undertaken from that vessel and from our two bases, enables us to better understand among others, the process and impacts of climate change, and thus to meet our obligation to protect and conserve fauna and flora around the Prince Edward Islands, and provide infrastructural support for South Africa's Antarctica treaty commitments .

Ocean Economy Programme:

The government of South Africa initiated the Operation Phakisa, which aims to implement priority programmes better, faster and more effectively. The first implementation of Operation Phakisa is led by the Department of Environmental Affairs and focuses on unlocking the economic potential of South Africa's oceans, which are estimated to have the potential to contribute up to one hundred and seventy seven (R177) billion rand to GDP by 2033 compared to fifty four (R54) billion rand in 2010, and increase the number of jobs from 316 000 to just over 1 million.

Operation Phakisa has brought together all stakeholders (Government, State-owned Companies, civil society, industry, labour and academia) to develop detailed delivery plans in four focus areas. These are Marine Transport and Manufacturing, Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration, Aquaculture and Marine Protection Services and Ocean Governance, Small Harbours Development, as well as Coastal and Marine Tourism.

In the short period of implementation, we have already seen some success. The programme demonstrated that we have to work together as different Government departments and all relevant stakeholders to realise the aspirations of economic growth yet balance the economic opportunities which our ocean space affords while maintaining securing its environmental integrity. Maintaining this integrity means applying high environmental standards to when undertaking activities like fishing and mineral exploration, but also identifying and formally protecting key habitats to ensure ecosystem sustainability.

Regional & Global partnership

South Africa ceded to the call by Agenda 2030 for mobilising regional and global partnerships as means of implementation of the SGDs. We are party to and is actively involved in the activities of these regional conventions (Nairobi, Abidjan and Benguela Current as well as IOC-Africa) whose main purpose is to advance the objectives of the SDG 14.

At global level, South Africa is a party to a number of multilateral environmental instruments, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), with their objectives in advancing the objective of the SDG 14.

Achievement & Commitment to implement SDG14

South Africa has put much effort in implementing the SDG14 under the lead of the Department of Environmental Affairs, namely:

Reducing marine pollution

Considering the target on reducing marine pollution, we realized that tackling land-based sources of marine pollution will require the challenging but necessary collaboration with a variety of sectors and user groups including, among others, sewage disposal entities, the agricultural sector, water management authorities, urban developers, extractive industries such as mining, port and harbour developments etc. In South Africa we have certainly learnt that problems around coastal pollution and coastal water quality cannot be solved by one government sector alone, and requires a willingness and commitment to work across sectors in an integrated manner.

We have also optimized our efforts to handle this important matter through our regional partnerships. The Western Indian Ocean region's efforts to address land-based sources and activities, preparations are currently being made by UNEP, to roll out the implementation of a project that seeks to implement Western Indian Ocean Strategic Action Programme, with key focus on the protection of the Western Indian Ocean from land-based sources and activities, adopted under the Nairobi Convention. The key focus areas of the WIO-SAP Project will be to:

- 1) Improve coastal water quality so that it meets international standards by 2035; and
- 2) Ensure that rivers are sustainably managed, and that the management of the coastal zone and river basins are fully integrated. This focus area will include the building of technical capacity on, and the application of, environmental flow assessment as a tool for wise river basin management.

Within the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem, shared by Angola, Namibia and South Africa, and which covers South Africa's West coast and part of our South coast, efforts are underway to identify hotspots of coastal pollution, under the Benguela Current Convention. Coupled with this, a regional monitoring programme is being developed to monitor water quality trends at the identified hotspots. I believe that initiatives such as these are worth mentioning because it will provide us with an indication of which land-based areas and adjacent river basins need to be investigated as sources of marine pollution. The Abidjan Convention is also currently finalizing protocols providing regional direction on Coastal Zone Management, environmental standards for the Oil and Gas Industry and the Protection of coastal mangrove ecosystems.

Managing, protecting, conserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems

We are negotiating interdepartmentally and with our stakeholders for Marine Protected Areas (MPA's) that will bring our ocean protection within the South African Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to at least 5% of this area. This is being done in a representative and well-focussed manner, so that this network of Marine Protected Areas covering 5% of our EEZ but will provide some protection to over 90% of all habitat types. South Africa is also developing a Marine Spatial Planning legislation which seeks to integrate all sector activities, protecting sensitive areas, and achieving certainty for investors.

South Africa has achieved this through its bilateral agreement with the government of Norway and the technical support from German funded project to develop the BCC Regional Marine Spatial Planning. To inform MSP from a conservation perspective, South Africa is in the process of revising descriptions for her “Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas” (EBSA’s) following the successful world-wide interventions undertaken by the CBD in this regard from 2010-2015.

Minimizing and addressing ocean acidification

South Africa initiated a research programme to monitor, amongst other parameters, long term changes in the levels and distribution of the pH mainly along the west coast of South Africa.

Increase scientific knowledge

South Africa will be participating in the Second International Indian Ocean Expedition under the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO. We developed a National Science Plan, which will be implemented during this current year through the environmental cruises by our research vessels, the SA Agulhas II –and the RV Algoa. I will be launching this expedition at national level, during the Council of Ministers of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, which South Africa will be hosting in October this year.

I have no doubt that the data analysis from these cruises will close the existing information gaps, particularly in the Indian Ocean and guide our policy direction to improve our ocean health, and better understanding of Global Climate.

Conclusion

South African Ocean region is globally recognized as unique and a hotspot of biodiversity and has over 10 000 marine species. The region is at a unique crossroads. The Atlantic, Southern and Indian Ocean's fishing grounds are among the healthiest worldwide, and coastal tourism is among the biggest income earners for many countries. Ports and other coastal infrastructure are growing in importance and the region is crossed by some of the world's main shipping lanes. Emerging prospects of oil and gas development offer unprecedented opportunities for growth.

But the accompanying challenges are great, with high risk of environmental and socio-economic impacts. Nevertheless, the prospect for a vibrant sustainable blue economy is on our doorstep and the framing of the SDGs provides both a vision and focused goals and targets for balancing economic, social and environmental aims, to bring benefits for the people of the region. South Africa has also Sub-Antarctic Island in the southern ocean which is also a unique marine environment and also the only African country with its presence in the Antarctic.

This presents opportunity for global partnerships in areas covered by Deep Ocean; Southern Ocean & Antarctic Science Programmes. South Africa is also at a point where we are open to new partnerships, as such calls for mobilising global partnerships to advance the objectives of the SDG 14.