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Statement by

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**at 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**

7 June 2017

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to participate in this historic event – the UN Conference to Support the Implementation of SDG 14.

I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson, for his initiative and his unwavering support for our oceans and seas.

I would also like to thank the Co-Presidents of the Conference, Sweden and Fiji, for their outstanding leadership.

Excellencies,

In 2015, world leaders gathered here to adopt the ambitious 2030 Agenda as our common masterplan for sustainable development.

SDG 14 to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources was adopted by all UN Member States as an important part of this integrated and indivisible Agenda.

Since then, we have been able to keep up the momentum and have made good progress in making the Agenda known also outside the meeting rooms and hallways of the UN.

Yet, much more needs to be done in order to fully realize the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda.

The intention of the Ocean Conference is to mobilize all stakeholders – including civil society, the private sector, academia, community groups and other relevant actors.

It therefore represents a most welcome opportunity to raise global awareness about the ecological, economic and social benefits of our oceans and seas and the urgent need to preserve them.

Excellencies,

The importance of this Conference cannot be overestimated. Scientific data gives reason to be very concerned about the state that our oceans and seas are in.

If we do not manage to turn the tide, we may soon reach a point where much of what we take for granted today may be lost to future generations. We have to find ways to reverse the cycle of decline of our oceans and seas.

Climate change, sea-level rise, ocean acidification and warming, loss of biodiversity, pollution and over-exploitation are all cumulative pressures caused by human activity. So it is up to us to find effective solutions.

The Paris Agreement as a global response to the threat of climate change is of utmost importance in this regard and closely linked to the implementation of SDG 14. Austria is firmly committed to keeping its targets within the framework of this agreement in order to keep global warming below 2 Degrees Celcius.

Only last week, Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz reaffirmed his full support for this landmark agreement and his firm belief that climate protection must be a global and common task and responsibility.

Concerning the degradations of our oceans, those that are most vulnerable are also those who are most directly affected. The economies and societies of Small Island Developing States are inextricably linked with the ocean, and they are the ones most under threat, especially by the rising sea levels.

This not only endangers their way of life, it can put their very existence at risk.

I would therefore like to express our strong support for the Small Island Developing States and to applaud them as the custodians of our ocean for their steadfast leadership and dedication to the implementation of SDG14.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While the deterioration of the oceans and seas has more severe impacts on some countries, this Conference underlines clearly that the health of the marine environment affects us all.

In a globalized world, where we are all interconnected, we share responsibility to safeguard our natural heritage and resources.

Thus, we have to answer the call for collective action by

- building on existing efforts to promote and strengthen sustainable ocean-based economies and
- by creating new and strategic partnerships.

Landlocked countries also depend on the oceans and seas as key providers of food and nutrition, maritime trade and transport as well as their function as climate regulators and source of biodiversity.

Therefore, despite being a land-locked country, Austria is strongly determined to join forces to meet this challenge.

As a Member State of the European Union, Austria is behind a host of measures undertaken as part of the EU's comprehensive package of voluntary commitments.

On a national level, Austria is well aware of its connection to the world's oceans and seas by way of its rivers, which directly or indirectly feed into the Black as well as the North Sea. We therefore take the implementation of sub-target 14.1. – the reduction of marine pollution – very seriously.

Plastic carrier bags are a common form of litter to be found in Europe's rivers and seas. As an ambitious voluntary commitment, the Austrian government in partnership with major supermarket, retail chains and NGOs has therefore pledged to reduce the total yearly amount of used plastic carrier bags to 25 per head by the year 2019.

Austria already undertakes very strong efforts to ensure that only treated water of the highest quality is discharged back into its rivers so as to reduce pollution loads reaching the receiving seas. Now, a further commitment has been taken to provide financial incentives from public funds to the extent of more than 60 million Euro per year between 2017 and 2021 in order to continue to reduce harmful discharges from urban and industrial waste water.

Also, another 65 million Euro per year have been devoted to reducing pollution stemming from diffuse sources between the years 2017 and 2021.

To support our friends and partners from Small Island Developing States, the international community is called upon to act decisively in their support under sub-target 14.7.

Austria is therefore very proud of its leading role in establishing Regional Centres for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency in the Pacific and the Caribbean. These centers serve to provide access to modern, affordable and

reliable energy services in the regions, thereby boosting the economy and supporting a sustainable energy sector.

Austria is also championing the raising of awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons.

These consequences were and still are very clearly illustrated by the lingering effects of nuclear tests, conducted – among others - on the territories of SIDS.

Despite this, progress in nuclear disarmament has been at a standstill for far too long and even the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty has still not entered into force.

I use this opportunity to call on all states to actively participate in the upcoming negotiations in June and July to conclude a prohibition of these most dangerous weapons and thereby ensure that this danger to civilization and the environment will be removed once and for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let us use our gathering here to drive forward concerted global action. Let us follow up words with deeds.

At this critical junction for the state of our oceans and seas, we owe it to future generations to act decisively and urgently.

We must

- push for the fulfillment of SDG14 and its related targets,
- realize the Call for Action we have agreed upon during this Conference and
- firmly stick to the voluntary commitments we have made.

Only then will we see a lasting impact and the transformative action that our ocean so urgently needs.

Thank you all!