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Statement by H.E. Mr. Neville Gertze Ambassador & Permanent Representative, 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

New York, 9 June 2017

Co-Presidents,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Over the past week, we have gathered here in this august Assembly of nations to reflect on the health of our Planet Blue, and to hear the plight of the oceans around the world. We have listened and heard the clear call for decisive action to right our wrongs and to take to heart the undeniable reality that water through the oceans is life. How we treat this life sustaining resource, will determine whether we will leave behind a world suitable for future generations to live in. With this heavy responsibility on our shoulders, I am honored to put on record the contributions of Namibia in pursuit of Agenda 2030 as well as the

AU Agenda 2063, relative to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 14.

2. May I however first join others in congratulating Your Excellencies, the Prime Minister of Fiji and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of International Development Cooperation and Climate of Sweden, on your appointments as Presidents of this Conference and for the outstanding manner in which you have presided over our work this week. My delegation endeavored without fail to support your stewardship of this historical event, up until its conclusion today.
3. Co-Presidents, Namibia aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Ecuador on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.
4. Namibia further welcomes the concise, focused and balanced intergovernmental “Call for Action” Declaration that is to be adopted at the conclusion of this historic and important Oceans Conference, which amongst others encapsulates all the basic tenets that would enable us to salvage our deteriorating marine ecosystems, especially the health of our seas and oceans, which are the primary sources of life for approximately 3 billion of the world’s population.

Co-Presidents,

5. With a coastline that stretches approximately 800 nautical miles and, with seas and oceans that have an exceptionally high biological productivity, Namibia boasts one of the most productive fishing grounds in the world, traversed by the cold Benguela current, as a result of the upwelling ecosystems that brings nutrient rich waters up from the depths of the seas and oceans, thereby stimulating the growth of microscopic marine organisms.
6. Namibia therefore, recognizes and attaches great importance to this first ever UN Conference to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 under the theme entitled: “Conserve and sustainably use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”.
7. The convening of this Conference is both befitting and opportune, seeing that it guides and provides us the opportunities to make decisions that would have positive and sustainable impacts on the health of our marine and coastal ecosystems, geared towards the sustenance of our future generations. In this connection, it is incumbent on all of us to work in tandem to overcome the challenges that may present themselves in order to make sure that “no one is left behind”. The health and well-being of the oceans is vital therefore, if we were to successfully address other challenges of hunger and poverty amongst others. The

interlinkages between SDG 14 and SDGs 1 and 2 therefore cannot be overemphasized.

8. Distinguished Co-Presidents, we all have a global responsibility to humankind and, that responsibility must be executed now. We need to join our energies in combating the challenges to our oceans and seas, which *inter alia*, include the acidification of the seas and oceans, over- and illegal fishing and waste pollutions, such as untreated domestic and industrial waste, the discharge of hazardous and toxic waste substances that are non-biodegradable and bio-accumulative, from various land-based industries and sea sources.

9. However, I wish to underscore the need for practical support, in terms of capacity-building, technology transfers relative to scientific knowledge to climate change adaptation expertise and financing, to effectively address these challenges relative to the management of our ocean resources sustainably and the creation of resilience amongst the most affected sectors of our societies.

Co-Presidents,

10. Shortly after our independence in 1990, Namibia crafted three tailor-made and strategic policies for the sustainability of its fisheries industries, including the protection of its maritime environment, as contained in its Marine Resources Policy of 2004. I am also pleased to share with you that Namibia is amongst the first countries in Africa that

inserted the concepts of environmental protection as a legal provision in its Constitution, as contained in Article 95 of our Supreme Law.

11. Article 95, provides, and I quote, “for the maintenance of ecosystems, essential ecological processes and biological diversity of Namibia and the utilization of living natural resources on a sustainable basis for the benefit of Namibians, both present and future”, end quote.
12. In 2013 Namibia joined forces with its coastal neighbors namely, South Africa and Angola to establish the Benguela Current Convention in pursuit of our strategies and plans of action to promote a coordinated regional approach for the long-term conservation, protection, rehabilitation, enhancement and sustainable use of the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem, including improving ocean health and stewardship, complemented by the generation of new tools to increase resilience.
13. We firmly believe that no ecosystem will remain unaffected by the diverse effects of rising carbon dioxide (CO_2) levels. The future of the ocean’s health depends on us. We are, therefore concerned about the adverse impacts of climate change; the singular biggest threat to the well-being of human-kind, human health and socio-economic development.

Co-Presidents,

14. The Paris climate accord, which indeed is the first global blueprint is a reflection of our determined multilateral efforts and, I submit is a historical victory for multilateralism.

15. It is a reflection of our multilateral efforts aimed at curbing the effects of a warming planet, but most importantly, it is a reflection of the scientific consensus on the severity of the crisis. It equally captures the crucial elements for the protection of our seas and oceans, under the UNFCCC blueprint for global climate action to fight ocean acidification, which indeed is a major threat to marine organisms, ecosystems, including other climate induced disasters, such as rising sea levels, ocean warming and deoxygenation, to mention, but just a few.

16. We all have the moral obligation and duty, not only to lead in reducing emissions, but to support poorer economies, especially those of the developing world who are on the frontlines of the effects of climate change. The transition to low carbon societies is inevitable.

I thank you for your attention.