

Oceans and the Seas, Forests and Biodiversity
Cyprus, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates

Mr Co-Chairs,

1 I have the pleasure to deliver these remarks on behalf of Cyprus, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates. We would like to thank the UN Technical Support Team (TST) for putting together comprehensive issues briefs on oceans and the seas, forests and biodiversity with very useful and constructive suggestions for our deliberation.

2 We observe that unlike topics like water and energy, topics of oceans and the seas and forests do not inspire the same confidence that they could be formulated into possible Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Perhaps this is because some countries do not have direct interest in oceans and the seas and forests as they are landlocked or do not have forests. The ‘haves’ and the ‘haves not’ obscure the fact that whatever happens to oceans and the seas and forests would have implications for the whole world. For example, unhealthy fish stocks will have an adverse impact on global food security and human health. Similarly, there are likely to be transboundary effects on human health, economic livelihoods and the environment through deforestation and forest degradation. As such, it is instructive that the TST briefs sketch out the economic, social and environmental rationale for the sustainable development of oceans and the seas and forests.

3 Given the universal nature of oceans and the seas, the Troika is of the view that a dedicated SDG on oceans and the sea may be considered. Cyprus and Singapore consider UNCLOS as the overarching framework to focus all efforts.

The importance of such a goal was stressed during the Blue Economy Summit hosted by the United Arab Emirates in partnership with the Republic of Seychelles during the recent Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week, 19-20 January 2014. As indicated by the TST brief, oceans-related goals and targets can be drawn from various sources such as: the annual General Assembly resolutions on oceans and law of the sea and on sustainable fisheries; Aichi targets 6, 10 and 11; Agenda 21; Johannesburg Plan of Implementation; Barbados Programme of Action; and target 7.B of MDG 7. Possible targets include sustainable use of the oceans and seas and their resources, including marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction, a healthy marine environment, and addressing ocean acidification.

4 Similarly, there is a need to focus efforts in achieving sustainable development for forests, given they “contain over 80% of the world’s terrestrial biodiversity”, through the concept of sustainable forest management, with initiatives like REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation). The Troika agrees with the TST brief that a specific SDG on forests could restore the balance between resources delivery and social demands on forests. The SDG could be constructed through existing initiatives that are forest related, like the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, Aichi biodiversity targets, and the strategic plan for biodiversity for 2011-2020 under the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD).

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5 This leads to the question as to whether biodiversity, in a broad sense, should be considered as a SDG. The Troika acknowledges that biodiversity is a cross-cutting issue, as it touches on a wide variety of issues, like oceans and the seas and

forests, climate change, food security and water. While it is possible to craft a SDG on biodiversity with targets on these issues, the potential downside to this approach is that the focus on biodiversity would be ironically diffused, given the number of sub-topics. As such, the Troika is of the view that biodiversity targets may be best addressed by mainstreaming into other SDGs.

6 I thank you.

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