



Statement on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) at the
26th plenary meeting of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly on
Agenda Item 72: Oceans and Law of the Sea

*9 December 2022
General Assembly Hall*

I have the honor of delivering this statement on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the group of countries that are most reliant on oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, due to our unique characteristics, dependence and particular exposure to the ocean and its biodiversity.

As the historic custodians of the ocean, we are deeply alarmed by the recent scientific findings affirming that the health of the ocean is deteriorating at unprecedented levels, with far-reaching and irreversible consequences to marine ecosystems, and the people that rely on them.

According to the Working Group II contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC, the increased frequency and intensity of the adverse impacts of climate change has resulted in widespread, pervasive effects on the ocean. The ocean's natural adaptive capacity is beyond its limits, resulting in the deterioration of ecosystem structures and functions, and mass mortality events causing the loss of hundreds of species. This has disproportionate socioeconomic consequences for countries such as SIDS that rely on the health of the ocean for economic viability. Furthermore, from the frontlines of these climate impacts, SIDS are also suffering unprecedented loss and damage, with irreversible impacts which must be urgently addressed.

In this context, we reiterate our long-standing call to urgently curb global GHG emissions, with the objective of limiting the global rise in temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, and also the call for greater finance for climate adaptation, including through ocean-based conservation measures. We also welcome the dialogue on the ocean and climate change that was convened during the Subsidiary Session of the UNFCCC in June this year, which strengthens ocean climate action under the Paris Agreement. We look forward to the future annual dialogues that will explore this nexus further, in light of the most up-to-date scientific findings.

Slow onset events of climate change are also becoming a reality for many SIDS. Sea-level rise, and its numerous implications must be addressed now, as this is no longer a future threat but an imminent one. In this regard, we welcome the work of the International Law Commission on this issue, considering matters such as statehood and the protection of persons, and potential implications for international law. In these discussions, AOSIS Leaders have affirmed that there is no obligation under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to keep baselines and outer limits of maritime zones under review nor to update charts or lists of geographical coordinates once deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and that such

maritime zones and the rights and entitlements that flow from them shall continue to apply without reduction, notwithstanding any physical changes connected to climate change-related sea-level rise. [Singapore: Amended for consistency with para 41 of the AOSIS Leaders' Declaration 2021.] We have also stated that there is a fundamental presumption of the continuation of states that may be inundated, and the Montevideo convention is not relevant to the question of continuation. It is also our view that protection of persons in the face of sea-level rise is a global challenge, and therefore the duty of cooperation is a general principle of international law. We look forward to further deliberations on this important issue, and will continue to advocate for the rights of SIDS to be protected when faced with sea-level rise.

In addition to climate change, marine biodiversity decline can also be attributed to other unsustainable human practices. There is a need for more ambitious global action to protect our planet's biodiversity, taking into account the important ecosystem services it provides. In this regard, we look forward to the adoption of an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework at the second part of 15th Meeting of the Convention on Biodiversity. At the same time, we must also expedite our efforts to protect marine biodiversity on the high seas, as we have now reached the conclusion of the Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. We call on all Member States to work constructively to bridge divides that will enable us to cross the finish line, and adopt the text for the new instrument at the resumed fifth session next year.

Another issue that has dramatically escalated over the last few decades, and taking a severe toll on the ocean is plastic pollution. With evidence emerging this year that microplastics have now been found in human blood, it is not only an environmental or economic issue, but one concerning human health as well. We therefore welcome the timely adoption of the mandate resolution to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. We believe this instrument should address past, present and future pollution, which includes remediation of plastic existing in the marine environment. The instrument must also contain robust provisions for means of implementation, considering the varied capacity for tackling this issue. We hope to make significant progress during the first session of the intergovernmental negotiating committee taking place in Uruguay later this month, especially considering the short timeline we have to complete the mandate.

As we strive for progress across these specific areas of ocean governance, we must not forget our overarching commitments in SDG 14 of the 2030 Agenda. As called for in the declaration "Our ocean, our future, our responsibility", adopted at the Second UN Ocean Conference, we need urgent and enhanced action to support implementation of the targets, with particular focus on targets 14.2, 14.4, 14.5 and 14.6. We also call for further impetus to target 14.7 to increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacities and transfer marine technology to SIDS. Due to our limitations in capacity, the vast potential for sustainable development through harnessing the ocean remains out of our reach. SIDS have highlighted the challenges and solutions behind successful partnerships through the "Declaration for the enhancement of marine scientific knowledge, research capacity and transfer of marine technology to SIDS", also launched at the Second UN Ocean Conference. We encourage all stakeholders to forge more effective and meaningful partnerships in line with our call, and in this regard welcome the Ocean Voices Programme that has emerged through support of the Nippon Foundation.

When considering the widespread impacts that result from decline in ocean health, it is important to keep in mind that Small Island Developing States are disproportionately impacted, due to our inherent and intrinsic ties with the ocean. It is also important to remember the historic role that we have played in conservation and sustainable use of the ocean, including through the use of traditional knowledge. Our sustainable development objectives enshrined in the SAMOA Pathway and 2030 Agenda are also closely linked with the ocean. Taking this into account, we call upon the international community to continue preserving the special circumstances of small island developing states in the context of oceans and law of the sea.

I thank you.