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Preparatory Committee established by General Assembly resolution 69/292: Development of an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction - Fourth session

Agenda item 5: General Statement

On behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum members

**Statement by H.E. Jane Chigiyal
Permanent Representative**

New York, 10 July 2017

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Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

I have the honour to deliver these remarks on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum members.

Let me begin by welcoming you back, Ambassador Duarte and all the delegates and other participants from far and wide. We are equally pleased to see the facilitators resume their respective roles in this seminal phase of the BBNJ process. We are confident that your leadership with the guidance of all the stakeholders will bring this process to a successful conclusion and pledge our full support and cooperation.

For the Pacific Islands Forum members, the Pacific Ocean and its health, productivity and resilience is inextricably linked to not only the livelihoods and sustainable development of the past and the present generation and but also those of the future generations' as well. As stewards of the oceans and seas and their resources, including fisheries, for our peoples and societies, our Leaders adopted in 2010 the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape, whose overarching vision is for "a secure future for Pacific Island Countries and Territories based on sustainable development, management and conservation of our Ocean." It highlights integrated ocean management, good ocean governance, biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and development of ocean resources, a healthy and secure ocean, and partnerships, cooperation and learning as strategic priorities. To coordinate and implement our regional oceans management and development priorities, the Forum's Secretary-General is performing her important leadership role as the Pacific Ocean Commissioner.

It is in this spirit that our Leaders in 2014 committed the Forum to support the establishment of an international legally binding instrument under the Convention for ABNJ. In the Pohnpei Declaration in 2016 the Pacific Island Forum Leaders reiterated the importance of maintaining the momentum towards a swift conclusion of the PrepCom and supported the convening of a time-bound international conference.

The Pacific Islands Forum members were strong advocates for the standalone Sustainable Development Goal on oceans, seas and marine resources. We also advocated for the holding of the Ocean Conference in order to implement SDG 14. We congratulate the hosts, Fiji and Sweden to the successful conclusion of the Conference and noted the interest expressed by both Kenya and Portugal to hold the next one.

Mr Chairperson, the Forum is strongly committed to sustainable use and conservation and protection of our oceans and marine environment, including in the fisheries sector and with regards to deep sea mineral activities. We continue to, collectively and individually, undertake significant work on these areas with the establishment of Regional Fisheries Management Organisation, the development and implementation of conservation and management measures for fish stocks, relevant framework from deep sea bed mineral activities and the creation of marine reserves and marine protected areas within national waters and promoting national, regional and international cooperation.

We however, do share concerns over the current and future state of the world's oceans. We commend the work carried out towards the First Global Integrated Marine Assessment Report, which paints a bleak picture. We would like to express our particular appreciation for the technical abstract on the conservation and sustainable use of BBNJ. We therefore underscore that urgent collective action is imperative to achieve greater coherence and coordination of ocean activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction, without undermining existing efforts, in order to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity.

For these reasons, we place great importance on this process of working towards the development of a new UNCLOS implementing agreement that would address the topics agreed in the 2011 package, namely area-based management tools, including marine protected areas, marine genetic resources and benefit sharing, environmental impact assessments, and capacity- building and the transfer of marine technology and other important issues.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are of the opinion, that the three sessions of the Preparatory Committee have been extremely constructive. We all now know much more about each other's respective positions and deliverables and we have identified a number of areas of convergence. We expect to identify a few more during this meeting and to strengthen others.

To give one example, the Pacific Islands Forum is unique in that our membership comprises both developed countries and small island developing states. As such we were heartened by the voices of support for the special case of SIDS in the instrument which should be strengthened in order to align with other legally binding instruments.

As a result, the Preparatory Committee will submit its report, including the substantive recommendations to the General Assembly. It is our expectation that the Assembly will subsequently take action to mandate the Intergovernmental Conference to start its work in 2018 and the focus will shift to drafting treaty language.

Mr. Chairperson, we pledge our support to help you make the final meeting of the Preparatory Committee a success. In doing so, set the stage to further strengthen implementation of international law as reflected in UNCLOS, which provides the legal framework for all activities in the oceans and seas.

Thank you.