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Agenda item 73: Oceans and the law of the sea

**Statement by H.E. Jane Chigiyal
Permanent Representative
On behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum**

New York, 7 December 2016

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Mr. President,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the members of the Pacific Island Forum. We would like to thank Mr. Thembile Joyini of South Africa, Mr. Andreas Motzfeld Kravik of Norway, and Ms. Margo Deiye of Nauru for bringing the negotiations on the respective resolutions to their successful conclusion and we look forward to their adoption.

Mr. President,

We welcome the continued emphasis on the universal and unified character of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). UNCLOS remains of vital strategic importance as the basis for national, regional and global action and cooperation in the marine sector, and it should continue to be reflected as it is in the Oceans omnibus resolution. It connects to a number of important events that have happened this year and I would like to highlight them and their inter linkages.

In late March and early April we had the first meeting of the 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. It was followed by the second meeting in August and September this year.

Our discussions were productive and we made good progress due to the skillful leadership of Ambassador Eden Charles from Trinidad and Tobago in steering our discussions. We are, however, dismayed that we could not welcome the progress achieved so far in the context of the Oceans Omnibus resolution which would clearly have been a factual statement. As many of us have been racing to meet the deadline to submit inputs on Monday this week, we will now need to study the wealth of information in order to prepare ourselves for the next meeting of the PrepCom which will start in March next year. We certainly hope to continue to make good progress as we are now at the half-way point in the preparatory process.

Mr. President,

On 2 May this year, the Pacific celebrated World Tuna Day here at United Nations Headquarters for the first time. Tuna is an important part of life in the Pacific. It provides employment, food security and many other benefits. In fact, many people in our region have a spiritual connection to tuna. It is therefore only logical that the United Nations would recognize the importance of the day and we are looking forward to adopt draft resolution A/71/L.27 later today. So far over 90 countries have sponsored the draft. We thank them for their support and we invite everyone else to join us.

In June, the Informal Consultative Process examined “Marine debris, plastics and micro-plastics”. The discussion was both timely and comprehensive, looking at the scale of the problem but also at a comprehensive set of solutions from prevention to removal. We welcome the report of the Co-Chairs on its work and its place within this year’s omnibus resolution. We also welcome the renewed mandate for the Informal Consultative Process, and that it will focus on the interaction of Oceans and Climate Change next year.

In August, we stressed the importance of the successful implementation of the second cycle of the Regular Process. It is essential that science underpins policy decision making on oceans and fisheries issues. The process here at the UN for obtaining the best available science is the development of the World Ocean Assessment. We welcome the decisions taken on the scope and duration of the second cycle.

Mr. President,

In September, we finished the modalities for the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of SDG14 which will be co-hosted by Fiji and Sweden in New York during the week of World Oceans Day next year. We welcome the appointment of the distinguished Permanent Representatives of Portugal and Singapore to facilitate the preparations and we look forward to working closely with them.

The concise “Call to action” will set the tone of our work, but the real success of the Conference will depend on the partnership dialogues. All stakeholders - states, IGOs, private sector and civil society are called to contribute to this success and to further the agenda by committing themselves to fully implementing SDG 14. We will all need to accelerate and strengthen commitments we have already undertaken and to put new ones on the table. A healthy, productive and resilient Ocean is key to the future of our blue planet.

Given the vastness of the Pacific Oceans, we have always seen ourselves as custodians in protecting and sustainably using our Ocean. At the Forty-seventh Pacific Islands Forum, held earlier this year in my own country, our leaders adopted the *Pohnpei Oceans statement: A course to sustainability*. It reinforces the inseparable link between our ocean, seas and Pacific island peoples: their values, traditional practices and spiritual connections. In this regard, the Pacific will continue to advocate for a healthy, productive and resilient Ocean here at the UN. It will contribute to our efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We thank everyone that contributed and supported these processes.

I thank you, Mr. President.

