



**Remarks**

**by**

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**President of the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations**

**General Assembly**

**Blue Economy Summit**

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*Please check against delivery*

H.E. James Alix Michel, President of Republic of Seychelles  
H.E. Dr. Sultan Al Jaber, Minister of State of the United Arab Emirates,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This two-day Summit provides an opportunity to advance discussions about the sustainability of one of the world's mightiest and most valuable assets: our oceans. Your discussions will provide an opportunity to clarify and frame the issues, galvanize political support and strengthen positioning in preparation for the upcoming SIDS Conference and for the negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda.

At the outset, I would like to thank our hosts for providing a platform for this conversation, in a city that is now well-known for its pioneering approach to sustainability. Our host country, not only shows determination to lead on sustainability, but is a strong advocate for South-South cooperation and supports other developing countries in achieving their sustainable development goals.

I would also like to commend Seychelles, a proud small island state, for its leadership in keeping the issue of the blue economy at the forefront of our attention during the preparatory process of the Third International Small Island Developing States Conference, to be held this September in Apia, Samoa.

The expression *The Blue Economy* entered the UN lexicon during the 2011-12 preparations for the Rio+20 Conference. It has come to mean a way of life or environmental, economic and social development that is linked to seas and oceans. Few countries are so acutely aware of the importance of oceans for sustainable development and livelihoods as our two host nations, both of which are intricately tied to the seas that surround them.

Small island developing states (SIDS) have a special appreciation of seas and oceans.

They define a way of life. The seas and oceans surround them. The inhabitants of SIDS have experienced the delicate flavour of fresh caught fish, and have seen the beauty of the full moon sparkling on the sea at night and more recently have begun experienced first-hand the ravages of the impacts of climate change, the coastal inundation and the destruction of coastlines and the habitats of marine life. SIDS know first-hand the adverse impacts on the way of life of their people, and in some cases how their geo-physical existence is at stake.

Excellencies,

With oceans covering two-thirds of the earth's surface, humankind's relationship with these vast bodies of water is an essential one. The oceans are in a very real sense the bloodstream of our planet. They are also the source of livelihood for large numbers of people - over three billion – who depend upon them. Oceans and coastal regions are key to poverty reduction and support a range of industries from fisheries to shipping, from tourism to marine transportation, often providing income opportunities for vulnerable groups such as women and youth. Ocean resources are the major source of protein for more than 2.6 billion people globally and are a regulator of greenhouses gases by capturing and storing 30% of the carbon humans produce.

Yet it is well known that despite their economic, social and environmental benefits, oceans, seas and their related ecosystems are facing numerous local and global threats caused by human activity and climate change. While oceans are indeed capturing carbon, the introduction of massive amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> into the seas is altering water chemistry and affecting the life cycles of many marine organisms, particularly those at the lower end of the food chain. Meanwhile, pollution, ocean acidification and unsustainable exploitation of marine resources are leading to enormous losses in biodiversity.

The nations of the world are all in agreement that preserving and protecting oceans and seas is crucial for the health of our planet and to supporting sustainable livelihoods, food and energy. The UN General Assembly has consistently recognized [quote] “the

important contribution of sustainable development and management of the resources and uses of the oceans and seas to the achievement of international development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.” [end quote]

Similarly, at the 2012 Rio+20 Conference, our world leaders committed to [quote] “protect, and restore, the health, productivity and resilience of oceans and marine ecosystems, and to maintain their biodiversity, enabling their conservation and sustainable use for present and future generations.” [end quote] In fact, the Rio+20 Outcome Document, *The Future We Want*, uses the words “we commit” and “commitment” in relation to oceans and seas more often than to any other single thematic issue.

In the context of the United Nations, we have already made a number of commitments in both the short and long term on a range of ocean-related issues, including: preparing a global integrated assessment of the state of the marine environment; improving market access for fish products from developing countries; restoring fish stocks; addressing marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction; and reducing marine debris. Many of these commitments have time-bound targets beginning in 2014, meaning that there is not a moment to spare.

Here at Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week and later this year in Samoa, we have an opportunity to see how we can now build on these previous commitments amongst others in support of the sustainable development of SIDS and coastal states. With this objective in mind, as you look toward the further elaboration of the blue economy, you may wish to focus on how to operationalize these commitments. In this regard, the following questions may prove useful:

1. How can we further assist developing countries in building their national capacity to manage and conserve sustainable fisheries?

2. How can we coordinate efforts at the regional, national and local levels to effectively curb marine pollution and protect marine ecosystems?
3. How can we coordinate efforts at the regional, national and local levels to effectively curb marine pollution and protect marine ecosystems?
4. How can we leverage partnerships and mobilize resources to help restore the health, productivity and biodiversity of damaged marine ecosystems?
5. What concrete measures can we take to mitigate climate change impacts on oceans and improve the resilience of coastal communities?
6. How can science, technology and innovation contribute to a better understanding of ocean changes and to the development of effective response strategies?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Given the level of interest, we can expect oceans to play an important role in discussions on the post-2015 Development Agenda, the stage for which I, as PGA, am undertaking throughout the year. At UN Headquarters, the Open Working Group, which is discussing possible Sustainable Development Goals, will take up the issue of oceans next month and we can anticipate a lively debate.

We can also expect that scheduled events in 2014 will serve to keep the issue of oceans and coastal regions on the agenda during the course of this year. The International Year of SIDS, to commence next month, and the Samoa Conference are two such examples.

As President of the General Assembly, having selected as my theme, *The Post 2015 Development Agenda: Setting the Stage*, you can rest assured that during my term I will do all that I can to ensure we remain mindful of the value of oceans, coastal regions and marine life biodiversity.

Given their importance, the success of the pursuit for sustainable development will be won or lost in the oceans. All member States, regardless of developmental or geographic status – have a responsibility to act. We are all custodians of this earth and we must all protect our seas and oceans.

Thank you.

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