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CONTRIBUTION FROM THE ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN CARIBBEAN AND PACIFIC STATES (OACPS) TO THE REPORT OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ON OCEANS AND THE LAW OF THE SEA

Background

The Organisation of African Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) is an international organisation comprising seventy-nine (79) Member States. Forty-eight (48) are from sub-Saharan Africa, sixteen (16) are from the Caribbean, and fifteen (15) are from the Pacific. All OACPS Members are vulnerable, developing countries. At least thirty-nine (39) are classified as Least Developed Countries (LDCs), fifteen (15) as Land-locked Developing Countries, and thirty-nine (39) as Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Sixty-four (64) members of the OACPS Members are coastal States.

The OACPS is guided by the Georgetown Agreement, as revised in 2019. It supports its Member States' efforts to eradicate poverty and, achieve sustainable development, and to fully benefit from the advantages of trade. The Ocean and its resources are central to the livelihoods, economy, health, and wellbeing of OACPS Members.

The "*OACPS Ministerial Mechanism for Oceans, Inland Waters and Fisheries*" is the coordinating framework for supporting OACPS' members to improve ocean governance, promote sustainable fisheries and aquaculture and the blue economy through strengthened partnerships with development actors and multilateral institutions, and cooperation between and among OACPS' countries and regional agencies.

The OACPS contribution to the Report of the United Nations' Secretary-General on "Oceans and the Law of the Sea" pursuant to paragraph 372 of the General Assembly resolution 78/69 covers activities undertaken by the OACPS Secretariat in collaboration with partners during the reference period.

Highlights of Activities undertaken of Relevance to Oceans and the Law of the Sea

I. Capacity Building

1. OACPS Capacity Building Workshop on Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea

The Secretariat of the OACPS requested the technical support of the United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UNDOALOS) in recognition of the need to enhance the capacity of member states to increase awareness of the Law of the Sea Convention and its related instruments. In this context, the *OACPS Capacity Building Workshop on Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea* was held in Brussels on 29 - 30 April 2024. The Workshop was co-organised by OACPS and the United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UNDOALOS). Participants included OACPS' Brussels-based Ambassadors, Senior Officials, and some representatives from Capitals.



The Workshop's main focus was on the key elements of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which sets out a comprehensive framework of enforceable rules and norms that are globally recognised in dealing with all matters relating to the Law of the Sea and is legally binding without reservations, by 169 Parties. Besides, the Workshop also covered important topics related to ocean governance, blue economy, and ocean finance, with a commitment to organise webinars focused on priority issues of interest to members.

The Workshop was a milestone in the successful collaboration between OACPS and UNDOALOS. The Members of the OACPS are committed to improving ocean governance and the sustainable management, use and conservation of the Ocean and its resources. Noting that 64 coastal States and 39 SIDS are members of the OACPS, the stewardship of the Ocean is of paramount importance and has been reflected as a priority in the Samoa Agreement, the overarching partnership framework between the EU and OACPS, signed in Apia, Samoa in 2023 and now under provisional application.

II. Coordination and cooperation

1. Promoting Ocean Climate Nexus at Global Events

International conferences provide a favourable setting for promoting priorities for addressing the ocean-climate nexus, including highlighting the impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems and the ocean mitigation potential. A majority of OACPS' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) identify coastal zone management and fisheries as a critical sector for adaptation and mitigation to reduce national emissions, build resilience to climate change impacts, and achieve the Paris climate objectives.

At COP 28 in Dubai in 2023, OACPS advocacy and engagements on ocean climate nexus was guided by the *OACPS Issues Paper for COP28* with a stronger call for COP 28 to include ocean-based action and solutions in the Global Stocktake process and the NDC revision process, building on the recommendations of the Informal Report from the Bonn Ocean Dialogue.

OACPS also promoted stronger Ocean-Climate action at the '*9th Our Ocean Conference 2024*', which convened in Athens, Greece, on 16-17 April 2024. The OACPS participation as a speaker in the Conferences Plenary Session on the *Ocean – Climate Nexus* highlighted the unmatched potential of the Ocean to mitigate climate change by sequestering carbon. The Ocean and its ecosystems are also critical for climate change adaptation and resilience building by providing a myriad of local and global benefits such as enhancing biodiversity, supporting the food security and livelihoods of coastal communities, and buffering and protecting coasts from erosion and flooding. Access to grant and highly concessional finance for all OACPS SIDS and vulnerable countries was highlighted, including the need to accept and use the UN MVI, and significant reforms of the global financial architecture and international financing institutions (IFIs).

2. Ocean Science Diplomacy event co-organised by OACPS, the University of Bergen, and Partners.

The OACPS, University of Bergen, the Arctic University of Norway, Arctic Frontiers, and the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance co-organised the "Ocean Futures 2030: Science and Diplomacy" event, which convened on 21 February 2024 in Brussels. The event shone a spotlight on the role of ocean science diplomacy, to improve the sustainable use of the oceans and their resources.

The event was attended by Brussels-based OACPS Ambassadors and Senior Officials, Norway and E.U. scientists, diplomats, and other stakeholders to discuss sustainable ocean development as a common heritage of humankind. Participants emphasized the need to respond positively to diplomatic demands for scientific information and called on scientists to involve diplomats in setting and defining ocean science diplomacy priorities.



The key conclusions of the event highlighted the need for countries of the global north to commit to a stronger collaboration with the global south, in all aspects of ocean science and diplomacy. This includes making sure that traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge can work together to provide the science diplomacy of the future. Participants also urged the global north to secure/guarantee funding for more joint global south-and-north initiatives in ocean science diplomacy, to fulfil global commitments for the Ocean as manifested in the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, especially SDG14 - Life Below Water, and the "UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development."

III. 8th Meeting of OACPS Ministers Responsible for Oceans, Inland Waters and Fisheries

As mandated by the OACPS Council of Ministers and in accordance with the Rules of Procedure for the OACPS Ministerial Mechanism for Oceans, Inland Waters and Fisheries, the biennial Ordinary Ministerial Meeting shall convene in 2024. It will be hosted by the Government of United Republic of Tanzania from 9 to 13 September 2024. OACPS Meetings for Ministers Responsible for Oceans, Inland Waters, and Fisheries aims to bring together policy leaders and key stakeholders to address pressing issues on oceans, inland waters, and the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, promoting sustainable practices, and exploring opportunities for collaboration, and knowledge-sharing and exchange.

Ministers will review the implementation of the "*OACPS Strategic Plan of Action for Fisheries and Aquaculture - 2030*" and its three-year *Prioritised Agenda for Action*, which identifies strategic priorities that will accelerate the development of a sustainable, productive, and resilient fisheries and aquaculture sector and strengthen ocean governance. The meeting is also expected to reinforce concrete actions for implementing shared ocean-related multilateral commitments to foster the stewardship of the Ocean, share national or regional good practices, and identify collaborative approaches for replication among other members of the OACPS and Regions.