



United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS)

**Statement**

**by**

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**and**

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**for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries  
and Small Island Developing States**

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High Level Segment

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Honourable Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me, at the outset, to join others in congratulating the Government of the Netherlands, and partner countries Grenada, Indonesia, Mauritius, Norway and the United States of America for organizing this summit, with the support of FAO and the World Bank Group.

The focus of the Summit on the need to address the next frontier of successful integrated approaches that attract public-private partnerships, secure financing and catalyze good ocean governance while reconciling the tensions and balancing priorities between (i) growth and conservation, (ii) private sector interests and equitable benefits for communities and (iii) EEZs and Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction policy frameworks is very timely.

The health of the oceans should be our point of departure in any discussions on oceans. Oceans are a key contributor to the globe's natural processes and cycles, including our climate. Fish provide some 3 billion people with 20% of their average per capita intake of animal protein. Marine resources provide the basis for employment, including almost 40 million people directly employed in the fisheries sector.

These numbers are even more staggering when you look at the countries that have perhaps more specific relationship with the oceans. These are the countries that see, breathe, and taste the oceans on a daily basis. These are the small island developing states of SIDS, one of the groups of countries that my office is mandated to carry out advocacy in their favour.

While some SIDS EEZs are bigger than others, the EEZs of the vast majority of SIDS are larger than their land mass. The claimed EEZ of the Republic of Kiribati (pronounced Kiribas) alone spans an ocean space about as wide as the width of the continental United States. While the collective land mass average of SIDS is about 24,000 square km, their average EEZ size is about almost 700,000 square km.

It is no wonder that a number of SIDS themselves, while acknowledging their smallness and the inherent vulnerabilities that accompany small size and remoteness, are repositioning themselves as 'large ocean states'. Indeed the Pacific SIDS region has been referred to as the 'Aquatic Continent'.

The basis for the livelihood of islanders is the ocean.

For many SIDS the relationship with the oceans and its resources go beyond these important numbers and labels. For these SIDS the oceans carry a deeper spiritual significance as well. Their cultures and traditions are influenced by their oceans that surround them and their interactions.

The traditional knowledge built-up over centuries, including on matters surrounding conservation and management of coastal ocean resources, should also play a role in any modern day conservation efforts. Indeed, concerted efforts should continued to be made and scaled-up as well that ensure that these traditional knowledge a properly collated and play a part in the overall coastal and marine integrated management plans, where applicable.

To a certain extent the international community has acknowledged this specific relationship between SIDS and oceans. The recognition of the 'special case' of SIDS was made in Agenda 21 of UNCED under the Chapter on oceans.

In return, all SIDS that are able to do so are parties to UNCLOS. SIDS remain active on matters concerning global ocean governance and are leaders in regional cooperation on matters concerning the oceans and marine resources.

While the tensions and balancing of priorities on matters concerning oceans are a global concern, these issues are much more easily observed in the SIDS context, given the fact of their specific relationship with their blue spaces and the other economic interests that are looking for opportunities in these spaces.

For many SIDS, in addition to the obvious food source that the ocean supplies, marine resources and the fisheries stock that occur within their EEZs are an important source of foreign income, mostly collected through license fees from distant water fishing nations who carry out fisheries activities within their EEZs. While the maximum sustainable yield threshold is the basis upon which tuna stock are measured, the precautionary principle and the ecosystem approach should also play an important and complimentary role in assessing fish stocks.

For while SIDS look to benefit from the exploitation of these resources, they are also fully aware that the conservation and management of these stocks is a key component.

The Parties to the Nauru Agreement took action in 2011 to close the high seas surrounding the eight member Parties (Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu) who collective, based on catch, are owners of 25% of the world's tuna supply to purse seine fishing vessels licensed to fish in their waters..

This is undoubtedly a drastic action that has been criticised as potentially being inconsistent with the UNCLOS. On the other hand others saw this as an innovative approach towards conservation and management of tuna resources.

It does seem unfair that many SIDS looking to further develop their fishing fleet are encouraged to do so through sustainable fishing and catch practices as pole and line, while the distant water fishing nations are always developing more efficient ways to catch as much fish stock, through unsustainable fishing practices, in a shorter amount of time.

There is a need to develop SIDS nationally based fishing through their own private sector which would in turn promote growth, create employment opportunities, through sustainable fisheries practices. Of course based on the maximum sustainable yield approach, the promotion of SIDS and coastal developing countries national fishing fleet and capacity could mean a reduction in revenue collected through licensing fees from distant water fishing nations. This is a delicate balance that will need to be considered by all concerned stakeholders.

The need for reconciling tensions between private sector interest and the equitable benefits for communities could continue to be done through a rights-based approach. This can augment the already established eco-system based approach. There are already many success stories in the application of this approach and while environmental concerns, including conservation and management measures, have always been, and rightly so I might add, at the heart of such approaches in marine resources sector, there is a need, in the context of many SIDS, to not lose sight of the social dimension, culture and traditions in the approach.

The role of the larger, perhaps more global fisheries private sector, to partner with SIDS own national private sector, either individually or as a collectively, in order to ensure that processing of fish stocks caught in EEZs of SIDS and developing coastal countries are landed and processed on shore also maximizes the employment opportunities for SIDS and other developing countries. This is being done now, but the need to scale-up such commitments should be encouraged. As such the development of suitable policy framework in distant water fishing nations and fish/tuna processing countries may need to be put in place to encourage such investments. Indeed, SIDS and other coastal developing countries would need to also ensure an enabling environment as well to ensure that such investments or joint venture can be successfully implemented.

This last March at an oceans event at the United Nations in New York, President Remengesau of the Republic of Palau, a Pacific SIDS, announced that Palau's 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone will be a "100 per cent marine sanctuary", effectively banning commercial operations within. This extremely drastic measure effectively means that Palau is also giving up access licencing fees but at the same time also ensures that the fisheries stocks in Palau's EEZ will potentially be very healthy.

This announcement also brings to the fore the ongoing issue of Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) Fishing. The opportunity for the private sector to be involved in surveillance of this vast ocean space is there. Palau will need all the help it can get in patrolling its vast ocean space against IUU fishing.

Healthy stocks also encourages poaching.

It is obvious that Palau, a country blessed with natural endowment, is focusing on its increasingly important tourism sector as the main source of its foreign exchange income earnings.

Other SIDS do not have other viable alternative sources of potential income and are heavily dependent on the fisheries sector.

While about 90% of the global tuna fish stocks are caught within EEZs, the interconnectedness of the oceans ecosystem does not necessarily follow the apportionment of the oceans spaces and the rights and duties of these spaces as enshrined in UNCLOS. As such, the ongoing discussions in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction is vital in shaping the future policies, law and the further regulation of ocean based human activity.

Here again the situation in a number of SIDS could show the way. I had alluded to the measures taken by the Parties to the Nauru Agreement and the conditionalities they had placed on license holders to not fish in the high seas. A number of these 'high seas' are in fact pockets of 'high seas' between the EEZs of Parties. As such this is a conservation measure for these areas of ocean beyond national jurisdiction.

As I also alluded to earlier, Kiribati is a SIDS that effectively has high seas ocean spaces within their nation. As such, any framework that is developed should consider their case which is a rather unique case in the context of coastal states. As such support and resources from the international community should recognise cases such as Kiribati's and appropriate mechanisms that address their specific challenges which are often magnified given their small size and associated constraints.

Once again, while carefully crafted instruments like the UNCLOS help in guiding and regulating human activity in the various ocean spaces, marine science and tools such as the ecosystem and precautionary approach should be emphasised.

May I take this opportunity to thank, Honourable Madam Disjksma, Minister of Agriculture, for your kind invitation to me to share my perspectives and for the hospitality extended to me during stay.

I wish this gathering every success and I look forward to its outcome.

Thank you for your attention.