



**Statement on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States at the Ocean Action Panels of the Third UN Ocean Conference**

**9 June, 2025 - Nice, France**

**OAP1: Conserving, sustainably managing, and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems including deep sea ecosystems**

**Delivered by: Honourable Fiame Naomi Mataafa, Prime Minister of Samoa**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, and colleagues,

I speak today on behalf of the 39 members of the Alliance of Small Island States on the critical issue of conserving and restoring marine ecosystems, including deep-sea environments. For Small Island Developing States, the Ocean is not merely a resource – it is our heritage, our home, and our future.

The special circumstances of SIDS cannot be overstated. We are stewards of more than 30% of the Ocean under national jurisdiction, which includes vast coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass meadows, and with more than 97% of our EEZs considered deep Ocean. Yet, we face unique vulnerabilities: fragile ecosystems, limited land resources, geographic isolation, and heightened exposure to exogenous shocks and climate disasters.

The science is unequivocal – marine ecosystems are experiencing unprecedented rates of degradation. Coral reefs, which support 25% of all marine life, could be lost entirely if the global average temperature increase exceeds 1.5°C. Deep-sea ecosystems, which are highly vulnerable, often requiring multi-generational timescales for recovery, now face mounting threats from climate change, pollution and resource extraction. The clock is ticking. We set our goals in the 2030 Agenda and more recently in the BBNJ Agreement and in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The next five years represent our last window of opportunity to implement transformative actions that can preserve marine biodiversity for future generations.

Despite our constraints, SIDS have demonstrated remarkable leadership in marine conservation:

- Of the 28 countries that have ratified the BBNJ Agreement, 13 are SIDS. As a bloc, AOSIS is actively engaged in the BBNJ Preparatory Commission to advance the objectives of the Agreement;
- On protected areas, the Republic of Marshall Islands protected its waters stretching 18,500 square miles. An area – bigger than the whole of Switzerland – will be fully protected from fishing and other extractive industries;

- Across the Caribbean and Pacific, as part of our Nationally Determined Contributions, regional and national initiatives have mobilized collective action to protect critical marine habitats while implementing innovative restoration techniques for coral reefs and mangrove ecosystems.

Our leadership, our commitments - are not simply conservation for conservation's sake - a healthy Ocean doesn't just benefit SIDS but people, economies and countries all over the world. To realise these benefits, support and finance are crucial. With our limited financial resources under threat from multiple angles, we demand that developed countries show true leadership by meeting and exceeding existing commitments and step up to provide new, additional, adequate, predictable, sustainable and timely financial resources, with priority and simplified access for SIDS and LDCs.

And, we must break down the barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusivity in Ocean science. SIDS, coastal communities, and Indigenous Peoples are not just stakeholders—we are the original custodians and stewards of these marine ecosystems. Traditional knowledge systems, held by such Peoples and communities, developed over generations of ocean stewardship, hold invaluable expertise that must shape decision-making at every level.

### Call to Action

While we are doing our part, the scale of the challenge demands a global response. Today, we call on the international community to:

- **First, rapidly scale up finance for marine conservation.** We need a quantum leap in both public and private finance to meet the scale of the challenge;
- **Second, accelerate capacity building and technology transfer** to support SIDS in gathering critical environmental baseline information, developing effective management plans and implementing robust monitoring systems.
- **Third, swiftly ratify and implement the BBNJ Agreement** with a robust finance mechanism to ensure its effective implementation.
- **Fourth, align economic policies with Ocean conservation** by eliminating harmful fisheries subsidies and ensuring that blue economy development does not lead to biodiversity and habitat loss, or compromise ecosystem health.

Distinguished colleagues, as Small Island Developing States, we have demonstrated what is possible when political will aligns with community stewardship.

But we cannot do it alone. The health of the global Ocean requires global cooperation, adequate financing, and technology transfer. AOSIS stands ready to continue leading by example and to work with all partners to ensure that marine ecosystems, from our shorelines to the deepest trenches, are conserved and restored for the benefit of present and future generations.

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