

## **74<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

### **Agenda Item 77 (a) Oceans and the Law of the Sea**

#### **INDIA STATEMENT By Mr. Yedla Umasankar First Secretary/Legal adviser**

10 December 2019

Mr. President,

Oceans are the world's single largest ecosystem, covering nearly three-fourths of the earth's surface, thereby providing a massive arena for emerging complex and interconnected development issues such as climate change, livelihoods, commerce, and security.

2. Water has offered a harvest for humankind across many dimensions, not least being the concourse of ideas, culture and partnerships across vast distances. The world's oceans are an essential part of sustainable human life on Earth. The world as a whole relies on healthy and resilient oceans for climate stability.

3. We thank the Secretary General for his Reports A/74/70 and A/74/350 on the oceans and the law of the sea, which covers, *inter alia*, legal and policy framework; maritime spaces; importance of the human dimension; maritime safety and security; and climate change. We would also like to thank Ms. Natalie Morris-Sharma (Singapore) and Mr. Andreas Motzfeldt Kravik (Norway) for coordinating the resolutions on Oceans and the Law of the Sea and on Sustainable Fisheries respectively.

Mr. President,

4. We believe that the Indian Ocean has been a powerful force for good in the geo-economics of world history. It can become the ocean of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a free and secure pathway for exchange of intellect, information, trade and culture that helps fashion a truly international harmony. It is in this context that India, in its interactions with other States, especially the littoral States of the Indian Ocean, is underscoring the importance of cooperation in Blue Economy.

5. In this context, we commend the Group of Experts for preparing the Second World Ocean Assessment, scheduled to be considered by the 'Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State

of Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects' in 2020. We welcome the revised preliminary timetable and implementation plan considered by the Ad Hoc Working Group and the estimated time to complete the second world ocean assessment.

6. The 20<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Open-ended Informal Consultative Process in June this year provided a unique forum for comprehensive discussions on "Ocean Science and UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development", facilitating the exchange of views among multiple stakeholders and improving coordination and cooperation between States and competent agencies. We welcome the Report (A/74/119) of the Group. We support the continuation of this process.

7. While the 1982 UN Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) lays down the basic framework of International Law governing jurisdiction of coastal States over adjacent maritime areas, what happens to the governance of areas beyond such jurisdiction is becoming increasingly important, especially in view of the rapid advancement in technology and our scientific understanding.

8. In this context, we acknowledge the third session of the Intergovernmental Conference on an international legal binding instrument under the UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) convened under resolution 72/249. We take note of the substantive discussions held which addressed the topics identified in the package agreed in 2011. The BBNJ is an important process that is expected to give shape to global governance in this area.

Mr. President,

9. India has over 7,500 km of coastline and more than thousand islands. India is a seafaring nation with a large coastal economy. We are acutely aware of the challenges and opportunities that oceans represent: from sustainable fisheries to prevention and control of marine litter and plastic pollution, from affordable renewable energy to eco-tourism and early warning systems for disaster risk reduction and management, building resilience and adaptation to climate change.

10. India recognizes Blue Economy as a driver of inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development. We must work towards innovative technologies for offshore renewable energy, aquaculture, deep seabed mining and marine biotechnology which provide new source of jobs. The need for 'greening' the ocean economy is also gaining importance.

11. India has an extensive institutional and legal architecture to manage the issues relating to oceans and coastal regulation. The Ministry of Earth Sciences, the National Institute of Oceanography and the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services, Centre for Marine Living Research and Ecology and the National Biodiversity

Authority are some of the institutions doing pioneering work related to oceans. An Integrated Coastal and Marine Area Management Project is involved in monitoring sea water quality, shore protection measures, shoreline management, oil spill models through the application of GIS, remote sensing and mathematical modeling for management of vulnerable habitats.

12. India is an active participant in the multilateral efforts at developing a collective management of ocean affairs and one of the early parties to the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of The Sea. In addition to UNCLOS, India is party to the Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of the Convention of 10 December 1982, Fish Stocks Convention 1995, MARPOL 73/78, the International Ballast Water Convention 2004 that protects invasive aquatic Alien species, the London Convention 1972 and other agreements that regulate various activities of the oceans, especially the conservation and sustainable use of ocean resources.

Mr. President,

13. While the legal regime on the regulation of the oceans is fairly well developed, the challenges faced in effective implementation of UNCLOS obligations and other related agreements are an important focus area.

14. Effective global partnership is necessary for capacity building and collaboration on technology; financial assistance; greater awareness and sharing scientific knowledge with LDCs, developing countries and those with special vulnerabilities to help them meet their international obligations.

15. India cooperates with partners in the region through its membership of the South Asian Seas Action Plan (SASAP) 1995, which is serviced by the secretariat of the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP). The main focus of the South Asian Seas Action Plan is on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), oil-spill contingency planning, human resource development and the environmental effects of land-based activities.

Mr. President,

16. We cannot allow our seas to turn into zones of contention. An age of shared prosperity demands cooperation. Secure and open sea lanes are critical for peace, stability, prosperity and development. In this context, India reiterates the importance of freedom of navigation and overflight on the high seas, unimpeded lawful commerce, as well as resolving maritime disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

17. The smooth functioning of the institutions established under the Convention, namely the International Sea-bed Authority, the International Tribunal for the Law of the

Sea (ITLOS) and the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), hold the key to proper implementation of the provisions of the Convention and to the realization of desired benefits from the uses of the seas.

Mr. President,

18. Three decades ago, India was the first country to receive the status of a Pioneer Investor in the Indian Ocean. Indian scientists today collaborate in research stations on the Arctic Ocean studying its links with climate in our own region. Indian hydrographers partner in capacity building efforts with our maritime neighbours. Indian institutions work closely with regional partners in improving early warning systems for tsunamis and cyclones. Indian naval ships are deployed in delivery of humanitarian assistance and emergency evacuation as also in patrolling sea-lanes against pirates. A disaster resilient world demands disaster resilient infrastructure. India remains committed to address the challenges of complex humanitarian emergencies through building disaster resilient infrastructure. In this context, India has taken the initiative to launch the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) in partnership with several other countries during the Climate Action Summit 2019.

19. India is strongly committed to protect its coastal and marine environment and attaches special importance to prevent and significantly reduce marine debris and litter by 2025, through global action and collective efforts of all stakeholders. In this regard, the Government of India has launched a massive campaign called “Swacch Bharat/Clean India” to clean up cities and villages and to rejuvenate its rivers. Since a major source of plastic debris is from land, this campaign will immensely contribute to reduce the inflow of plastic into the seas. Under this campaign, we undertook the commitment to eliminate single-use plastic in India by 2022.

20. India is committed to the implementation of 2030 Agenda including the SDG 14 to achieve sustainable development of its Blue Economy partnership. Prime Minister of India has announced India's priority to the Indian Ocean region through the concept of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region). Under this, India would continue to actively pursue and promote its geo-political, strategic and economic interests on the seas, in particular the Indian Ocean.

Thank you Mr. President.

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