

Minister of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping

**“Our Ocean 2017, an Ocean for Life” Conference in Malta,
5-6 October 2017**

**Keynote address for Panel Session on Sustainable Fisheries and
Announcements of Commitments for the Republic of Mauritius.**

Chairperson

Honourable Ministers

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be associated with the fourth high level conference our ocean organised by the European Union.

I would like to thank the organising committee and the Government of Malta for all your tireless efforts in making this Conference a success.

The theme of this Conference “Our Ocean Economy 2017, an Ocean for Life” resumes in itself the importance of the oceans for the world population. The oceans provide half of the planet’s oxygen.

Our ocean plays a critical role in the global response to climate change. They absorb almost 30% of all greenhouse gases as well as 90% of the excess heat caused by global warming. It is a fact today that our atmosphere and oceans are experiencing drastic change: they are warming up and changing composition faster than ever recorded.

The obvious consequences are the rising sea levels, extreme weather conditions, we have the example of the recent hurricanes in the Pacific, ocean acidification, coral bleaching and damage to the ecosystem. These are threats to food chains, ecosystem services as well as livelihoods and jobs at a larger scale.

For small islands developing countries the consequences are dramatic as we are more vulnerable to the resulting economic damage, as are coastal lowlands where trade, wealth and most of the world's population are concentrated. Above 40% of the world population lives within 100 kilometres of the coast. Governments need to scale up their efforts to conserve marine ecosystems from the impact of climate change.

The organisation of this Conference is a laudable initiative as it brings together countries around the world, experts and decision makers to address the challenges faced by the oceans.

The international community has put hands together and has taken various initiatives to address the conservation of our oceans. The Paris Agreement and the adoption of UN Sustainable Development Goals show international commitment to address these problems. In September 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at an historic UN Summit in New York. Integral to these goals is SDG 14, which aims to conserve and sustainably use resources of the ocean. But we need to make sure that our actions are consistent with a healthy ocean. We need to continuously scale up our efforts to conserve the marine ecosystem from the impact of climate change. We require immediate action by all countries, and a common understanding that what is at stake is the well-being of human kind.

Mauritius fully supports the international initiatives to contribute towards the sustainable development of fisheries. Mauritius is already party to many of the international instruments in its quest to conserve the ocean.

Mauritius is highly vulnerable to adverse climate change. In fact, according to the latest World Risk Report 2016, Mauritius is ranked as the 13th country

with the highest disaster risk, and ranked 7th on the list of countries most exposed to natural hazards.

Climate change is already generating ecological, social, and economic impacts on fisheries. These effects are expected to increase in frequency and magnitude in the future. Although SIDS are among the least responsible of all nations for climate change, they are likely to suffer strongly from its adverse effects.

Concertation, consultation and common preventive policies are vital to minimise the adverse externalities. Rich and big economies need to make even greater efforts, towards financing, building awareness and participating in surveillance exercises to reverse the trend of global warming and depletion of ocean resources.

Small-scale fisheries and aquaculture will be amongst the first sectors to feel its impacts. Some anticipated consequences include decrease in productivity, species migration and localised depletion of stocks. The coral reef ecosystem is already under the threat of rising sea surface temperatures and acidification of the oceans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The development of the ocean economy spearheads the economic diversification aiming at reducing our economic vulnerability to exogenous shocks as it encompasses a wide range of sectors that could address key developmental challenges facing SIDS. By harnessing ocean resources the issues of poverty, food and energy insecurity, unemployment and ecological imbalances can be effectively tackled. In this regards, the ocean economy initiatives are vital to the growth of the SIDS.

Mauritius is developing its ocean economy and in our Vision 2030, Ocean Economy is called to be one of its main pillars of development.

We have already a road map with the objective to double the GDP share of the ocean economy in 10 years and to create 25,000 jobs. The current contribution to GDP of ocean economy is 10%. We are now working with the World Bank to produce an action plan to make it happen.

I would like to talk about the Deep Ocean Water Application (DOWA) project which has now reached implementation phase. It will use deep ocean water for air conditioning purpose, and will also carry out downstream activities such as water bottling, aquaculture and thalassotherapy. This project will decrease our dependence on fossil fuel.

To better develop the ocean economy in a sustainable way we need capacity building for research purpose and new technology. We want our action to be consistent with a healthy ocean, not only for economic development. We are convinced that we should leave a healthy legacy to our future generation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the theme of this Conference is to develop effective regional network for marine protected areas. Mauritius has set up three marine parks and six fishing reserves. However, I would like to underscore that marine protected areas should be created in full respect of international law. In this regard, I wish to recall the Award delivered by the Arbitral Tribunal in the case brought by Mauritius under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in respect of the 'marine protected area' purportedly established by the United Kingdom around the Chagos Archipelago which forms an integral part of the territory of Mauritius. In its Award, the Arbitral

Tribunal declared the purported 'MPA' to be in breach of certain provisions of UNCLOS and therefore illegal under international law.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mauritius is proud to announce that it is taking the following commitments as its contribution to have a healthy ocean:

- (1) Combat IUU fishing through an assessment of the fishing vessels operating in the waters of the IOC States.
- (2) Restoration of the degraded coral reefs through coral farming by setting up coral nurseries.
- (3) Study on untapped resources in the maritime zone of Mauritius for sustainable exploitation.
- (4) Evaluating the anthropogenic accumulation of micro-plastics across Mauritius waters to probe into their potential impact on human health.
- (5) Ocean data management for sustainable development and management of ocean resources.
- (6) Empowerment of the fishing communities through a two-month closure of Octopus fishing to allow replenishing of the stock.
- (7) Mauritius will elaborate, with the support of relevant partners, a Marine Spatial Plan for the maritime zones of Mauritius to sustainably and effectively manage the competing uses of our ocean.

The details of these commitments have already been forwarded to the Secretariat of the conference.

Thank you for your attention.

