

**United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process
on Oceans and the Law of the Sea**

Monday, 17 June 2013, 10:00 a.m.

Conference Room 1 (CB)

**Remarks by Ms. Patricia O'Brien
Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs
The Legal Counsel**

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I have the pleasure of welcoming you to New York for the fourteenth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea. As you know, in its resolution 67/78 of 11 December 2012, the General Assembly, renewed the mandate of the Informal Consultative Process for another two years. It also decided that this year's meeting will focus on "The impacts of ocean acidification on the marine environment".

At the outset, I wish to congratulate Ambassador Meetarbhan of the Republic of Mauritius and Ambassador MacKay of New Zealand, on their re-appointment as Co-Chairs of the

Informal Consultative Process. They led the Informal Consultative Process to a successful outcome in previous years and I am confident that their experience and leadership will once again steer this meeting towards a productive conclusion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Secretary-General, in his report on oceans and the law of the sea (document A/68/71), provides useful background information on the process of ocean acidification and its impacts on the marine environment. The report also highlights some challenges and opportunities in addressing those impacts.

The importance of the oceans to humankind cannot be emphasized enough. They provide numerous ecosystem services such as regulation of pollution, fisheries and tourism, which contribute significantly to global employment and economic activity. The oceans also play a crucial role in the global carbon cycle by absorbing at least a quarter of the carbon dioxide that is emitted through various anthropogenic activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels.

Over time, the absorption of atmospheric carbon dioxide by the oceans has resulted in changes to their chemical balance, causing them to become more acidic. The process of acidification may reduce the ability of oceans to continue absorbing carbon dioxide, thus also affecting the carbon cycle and the stabilization of atmospheric carbon dioxide. In addition, many of the organisms most sensitive to ocean acidification are directly or indirectly of great ecological, economic and cultural importance. For example, ocean acidification reduces the resilience of coral reefs and their ability to act as barriers to coastal erosion and as habitat for many species of fish.

Ocean acidification is thus foreseen to have adverse impacts not only on marine ecosystems, their functions and services, but also on the livelihood of people that depend on them. In this context, ocean acidification is a serious cause for concern in our attempts at achieving sustainable development.

Small island developing States, which rely extensively on the oceans and their resources, are particularly vulnerable to the threats posed by ocean acidification. The changes in the marine environment resulting from ocean acidification would significantly impact their path towards sustainable development.

While there is still a need for more scientific research, the changes presently occurring in the oceans due to ocean acidification are considered to be certain and predictable, long-lasting and potentially irreversible. Action by all stakeholders, including through cooperation, and at all levels is therefore urgently needed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year, we marked the important milestone of the 30th anniversary of the opening for signature of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. As you know, the Convention is the only comprehensive treaty on oceans and law of the sea that sets out the legal framework for all activities in the oceans and seas. It is also recognized that the Convention plays an important role in advancing sustainable development.

Many of you will also recall that last year the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development convened in Rio de Janeiro Brazil. Member States adopted a number of oceans-related commitments, which are essential for achieving the sustainable use and management of the oceans and their resources. In the outcome document of the Conference, entitled the "The Future We Want", there was a call, in particular, for

supporting initiatives that address ocean acidification and the impacts of climate change on marine and coastal ecosystems and resources. The need to work collectively to prevent further ocean acidification, as well as to enhance the resilience of marine ecosystems and of the communities whose livelihoods depend on them was reiterated. Member States also highlighted the need to support marine scientific research, monitoring and observation, including through enhanced international cooperation.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 67/78, recalled the Rio commitments relating to ocean acidification. Among other things, the Assembly particularly encouraged States, competent international organizations and other relevant institutions, individually and in cooperation, to urgently pursue further research on ocean acidification.

A number of initiatives and activities related to the impacts of ocean acidification on the marine environment have been undertaken at the global, regional, national, and interagency levels. These include research on, and monitoring of, these impacts on marine biodiversity and ecosystems, as well as mitigation and adaptation initiatives. This meeting of the Informal Consultative Process provides an opportunity to learn about these activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ocean acidification is still a relatively uncharted area and there remain challenges in, as well as opportunities for, assessing and addressing its impacts and ramifications.

In this regard, this meeting of the Informal Consultative Process marks a step forward in considering ways to better understand the process of ocean acidification and address its impacts on the oceans, having due regard for the three pillars of sustainable development. It presents us with an opportunity to consider options to adapt to and mitigate these impacts in such a way that the realisation of sustainable development becomes achievable for all, both now and for generations to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I did last week during the twenty-third Meeting of States parties to the Convention on the Law of the Sea, I wish to inform you that this will be the last year in which I have the privilege to address the Informal Consultative Process in my capacity as the Legal Counsel of the United Nations. Over the past five years, I have had the pleasure of working directly with you and through

the Division on particular issues relating to developments in ocean affairs as identified by the General Assembly. It has been an interesting and truly rewarding experience.

One last time in this context, I wish to assure you of the full support of the Office of Legal Affairs, through its Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea. Allow me to convey my best wishes for informative and productive discussions this week.

Thank you.