



# UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS

## Talking points

For

**Mr. Serpa Soares**

Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and  
United Nations Legal Counsel

### **Briefing to Member States on the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development**

New York, 13 December 2016

#### Introductory remarks

- The last few months were rich in developments confirming the increasing momentum on oceans issues and the commitment of States towards sustainable oceans and seas.
- These developments have included:
  - a rich discussion and exchange of views at the first two sessions of the Preparatory Committee established by General Assembly resolution 69/292: Development of an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction;
  - the adoption, by consensus, of comprehensive recommendations by the Resumed Review Conference on the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks;
  - the convening of a two-day workshop to discuss implementation of relevant resolutions addressing the impacts of bottom fishing on vulnerable marine ecosystems and long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks and the decision by the General Assembly to conduct a further review in 2020; as well as



- The presentation of the First Integrated Global Marine Assessment, which examines the state of knowledge of the world's oceans and the ways in which humans benefit from and affect them. The Assessment was welcomed by the General Assembly, which approved its Summary and decided to launch the second cycle of the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socio-economic Aspects (the Regular Process).
  - The year 2017 is expected to be no less productive, in particular with the convening of the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14).
  - Given the vital importance of achieving the targets in SDG 14 for present and future generations, I have made that Conference one of my priorities, not the least because it includes the critical target to “Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources *by implementing international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources*, as recalled in paragraph 158 of The Future We Want”.
  - The Conference represents a significant opportunity to galvanize efforts and partnerships towards the strengthened implementation of international law, as reflected in UNCLOS.
  - I am therefore pleased to have this opportunity to address you today and to set out how I intend to support, as Special Advisor to the Co-Presidents of the Conference the achievement of the goals of the Conference, also in close cooperation with the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Wu Hongbo. I wish to add that in my capacity as Focal Point for UN-Oceans – the inter-agency coordination mechanism on oceans and seas in the United Nations System - I am already committed to do so in collaboration with members of UN-Oceans.
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- Special Advisor functions
  - As Special Advisor to the Co-Presidents on oceans and legal affairs, my role will be both substantive and procedural.
  - As you are aware, my Office discharges the responsibilities of the Secretary-General under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and provides a range of legal and technical services relating to UNCLOS and its implementing Agreements, in particular the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement with a view to promoting their better understanding, their wider acceptance, uniform and consistent application and effective implementation.



- My Office also supports the General Assembly in its policy-making role regarding ocean affairs and the law of the sea, as well as its subsidiary bodies such as the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, the Preparatory Committee established by General Assembly resolution 69/292: Development of an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, and the Regular Process. My Office, as the secretariat of the Regular Process and its established bodies supports the raising of awareness about the Assessment and its future iterations towards reinforcing the science-policy interface for the oceans. My office has also been charged by the General Assembly with providing support for the implementation by Member States of the oceans-related Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- From a substantive point of view, I will therefore provide the Co-Presidents with advice on ocean affairs and the law of the sea, as necessary.
- From a procedural point of view, I will continue to carry out the functions entrusted to me and my Office with regard to providing advice on matters arising out of the implementation of the rules of procedure for the Conference, as well as on any other procedural matter that may arise, including in relation to preparations for the Conference.
- My Office will also play a leading role in the organization of the annual celebration of World Oceans Day on 8 June, which the Conference will mark through a special commemorative day.
- UN-Oceans Focal Point
- The problems of ocean space are closely interrelated and need to be considered as a whole, as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- The current challenges facing the oceans also need to be considered from an integrated, cross-sectoral and comprehensive perspective. Promoting cooperation and coordination at all levels is essential to that end.
- In this regard, I believe that there is a significant supportive role that can be played by UN-Oceans in the Conference. Its members are committed to contribute to its successful preparations.
- I personally attach great importance to the Conference and in my role as Focal Point of UN-Oceans I therefore also attach great importance to UN-Oceans contributing meaningfully to the Conference and its preparatory process.
- Cooperation with the Secretary-General of the Conference
- Apart from the ongoing collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) including through UN-Oceans, I am also very pleased to have the opportunity to as Special Adviser, to work closely with the Secretary-General of the Conference.



- My Office, through the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, has been working with DESA on the preparation of the Conference documents, in particular the Secretary-Generals' background note requested in the modalities resolution.

- Concluding remarks

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- I look forward to working closely with the President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, the Co-Presidents, the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Wu Hongbo, and the Co-Facilitators of the preparatory process, H.E. Mr. Alvaro Mendonya Moura, Permanent Representative of Portugal to the UN, and H.E. Mr. Burhan Gafoor, Permanent Representative of Singapore to the UN, in order to ensure that the Conference is a success.

*You can count on my full support, including through the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, as well as the Office of the Legal Counsel.*