



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

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

Opening statement

By

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The United Nations Legal Counsel

United Nations Headquarters
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Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I have the pleasure of welcoming you to the seventeenth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea. At the outset, I wish to congratulate Ambassador Meza-Cuadra of Peru on his re-appointment as Co-Chair and Ambassador Emiliou of Cyprus on his appointment as Co-Chair of the Informal Consultative Process. I am confident that their experience and leadership will guide this week's meeting towards a meaningful discussions.

As you are aware, in its resolution 69/245 of 29 December 2014, as recalled in resolution 70/235 of 23 December 2015, the General Assembly decided that this year's meeting would focus on "Marine debris, plastics and micro-plastics". The topic has been of increasing concern in recent years and rightly so. The report of the Secretary-General on the topic of focus of this meeting, based on the wealth of information contained in recent studies and assessments, including the First Global Integrated Marine Assessment, depicts an alarming picture of how marine debris,



including plastics and micro-plastics, are affecting the world oceans and hindering sustainable development.

The First Global Integrated Marine Assessment, released last year, dedicated an entire chapter to marine debris. Among its findings, the Assessment noted that marine debris is present in all marine habitats, from densely populated regions to remote points far from human activities, from beaches and shallow waters to the deepest ocean trenches. Plastics are by far the most prevalent debris item recorded, contributing an estimated 60 to 80 per cent of all marine debris. Recent scientific research has also highlighted the potential environmental impacts of plastic nanoparticles. The Assessment further indicated that marine debris commonly stems from shoreline and recreational activities, commercial shipping and fishing as well as dumping at sea.

The majority of marine debris (approximately 80 per cent) entering the sea is considered to originate from land-based sources, and plastic marine debris results from the poor management of waste streams on land and at sea. Abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear are also cause for concern as noted in the Assessment.

Distinguished Delegates,

The issue of marine debris was one of the topics of focus of the sixth meeting of the Informal Consultative Process in 2005. Since then, the issue of marine debris (or marine litter as it is also referred to) has been addressed annually by the General Assembly in its resolutions on oceans and the law of the sea and on sustainable fisheries, wherein it has made a number of calls for action to tackle the problem. Emphasis has been placed on the growing role of plastic pollution since “The future we want”, which noted with concern that the health of oceans and marine biodiversity were negatively affected by marine pollution, including marine debris, especially plastic.

“The future we want” therefore included a commitment to take action to reduce the incidence and impacts of such pollution on marine ecosystems, including through the effective implementation of relevant conventions as well as the adoption of coordinated strategies to this end.

In furtherance of these objectives, Sustainable Development Goal 14 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a target to prevent and significantly



reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris, by 2025.

These calls and objectives take on greater weight as the quantity of marine debris, plastics and micro-plastics in the oceans continues to grow, including as a result of the increased durability of the material and the continued increase in global plastics production. It is therefore fitting to see the issue addressed in an increasing number of international fora, including most recently by the second meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly, held in May this year, and later this year by the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Distinguished Delegates,

The report of the Secretary-General on the topic of focus of this meeting provides information on the sources and pathways of marine debris, including plastics and micro-plastics, and gives an overview of the environmental, economic and social impacts. It further outlines the actions undertaken at the global, regional and national levels to prevent and significantly reduce marine debris, including plastics and microplastics, in particular to:

- gather the best available scientific information,
 - develop targeted policies and legislation,
 - establish the adequate infrastructure,
 - undertake awareness-raising, education and capacity-building,
- and
- strengthen cooperation and coordination

The report further elaborates on the action necessary to prevent and significantly reduce marine debris, including plastics and micro-plastics, in particular to address data and knowledge gaps as well as regulatory, implementation and enforcement gaps, and build on best practices and best available techniques.

In its conclusions, the report notes that urgent action is required to address activities and patterns of behaviour on land, including harmful production and consumption patterns.

In particular, the improvement of product life-cycle management and the development of cleaner technologies and waste management infrastructures require



attention. There is also a considerable need for greater awareness-raising efforts among populations living near as well as far from the coast, with a view to curbing activities that have the potential to pollute the marine environment through riverine run-offs and debris-carrying winds. As concluded in the report, it will be of critical importance to intensify efforts in order to achieve internationally-agreed upon commitments, including those reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 14.

Distinguished delegates,

The presentations and discussions this week will likely delve into some of these aspects in greater detail from the national, regional and global perspectives.

At this juncture, I wish to highlight that a number of legal and policy instruments at the global, regional and national levels address various aspects of the issue.

Implementation of these instruments, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, needs to be strengthened for effective prevention, reduction and control of marine debris, including plastics and micro-plastics. Stepping up efforts to develop the capacity to effectively implement the Convention, its implementing Agreements and other relevant instruments will be critical for tackling the problem.

Your discussions this week are timely and important to highlight the collective responsibility of all stakeholders — Governments, industry and consumers — to act promptly and resolutely to prevent, reduce and control pollution from marine debris, plastics and micro-plastics. As the Secretary-General has noted in his report, oceans are — and must continue to be — an essential asset for efforts to achieve the sustainable development of present and future generations.

Allow me to convey my best wishes for informative and productive discussions this week.

Thank you.