**JOINT STATEMENT FROM MEMBERS OF THE GREEN GROUP ON**

**THE OCCASION OF WORLD OCEANS DAY, 8 JUNE 2020**

*On the occasion of World Oceans Day on 8 June 2020, the members of the Green Group – Cabo Verde, Costa Rica, Iceland, Singapore, Slovenia and the United Arab Emirates – reaffirm and underscore their commitment to addressing the impact of climate change on the marine environment and to taking actions to preserve the sustainability of the world’s oceans.*

Oceans cover over 70 percent of the Earth’s surface, and together represent the largest living space on the planet that is home to an estimated 2.2 million species, many of which are under threat.

Oceans supply an abundance of living and non-living resources – from fisheries and marine biotechnology to minerals and renewable energy. With many nations responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of oceans in safeguarding our food security and economic well-being is becoming more important than ever.

Ocean currents are instrumental in transferring heat around the world, shaping Earth’s climate and weather systems. Oceans also form the largest carbon sink on the planet, holding up to 50 times more carbon than the atmosphere and absorbing about 30 % of the emitted anthropogenic carbon dioxide.

However, human activity is putting enormous pressure on oceans. Climate change, ocean acidification due to rising carbon level, ocean warming and deoxygenation, overfishing, IUU fishing, loss of biodiversity and habitats, land-based and ship-based pollution, plastic litter, overuse and unsustainable coastal development, sedimentation, and biological invasions are significant threats that require collective action. The adverse impacts of climate change impair the crucial ability of the ocean to act as climate regulator. Success in fighting climate change would therefore have a significant beneficial effect on the marine environment.

The UN’s Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs) include 10 targets concerning the ocean under SDG 14: Life Under Water, four of which are due in 2020. However, these targets may not be enough and increased efforts on appropriate science based protection of the oceans may help avert climate disaster.

We have made great strides in putting the ocean at the centre of the environmental debate over the past few years. With a growing public interest in oceans worldwide and the realization that their preservation plays an intrinsic role in the achievement of the SDGs, in particular, SDG 14, there is great hope for more support for conservation efforts and sustainable use of the oceans.

As we celebrate World Oceans Day today, we have seen many commitments over the past few years, but global action has been slow.

To fast-track the progress, new and improved technologies and materials will be crucial to establishing a sustainable coastal and ocean economy. They will enable industries such as shipping, cruising, and aquaculture to meet increased demand more sustainably.

Oceans are of special importance to each of the Green Group members.

Cabo Verde has the largest area of ocean in West Africa and is a global hotspot for marine life. Illegal fishing presents a serious threat to Cabo Verde’s marine biodiversity as well as to the livelihoods of coastal fishing communities. The country is a leader in ocean conservation in the region, with plans to protect five percent of its vast marine territory by 2025. The government has already established 19 small coastal marine parks and runs several wildlife reintroduction programmes.

Costa Rica’s Atlantic and Pacific coasts boast 970 km of coral reefs, including the largest coral reef in the Caribbean. However, more than 90 per cent are threatened by climate change and human activities. Costa Rica is making significant progress in coral reef conservation, including nursery farming of endemic coral species. On World Oceans Day 2019, President Carlos Alvarado signed a decree on the promotion of restoration and conservation initiatives for the recovery of coral ecosystems.

Iceland has a long-standing policy on science based environmental protection and sustainable use of marine resources. In recent years, the main focus has been on increasing the value of products and services in the blue economy, on energy transition and lowering emissions in fisheries and marine transportation, and on preventing marine pollution, not least macro and micro plastics, in the ocean.

Despite being one of the busiest maritime ports in the world, Singapore retains a variety of healthy coastal and marine habitats. Our Marine Conservation Action Plan has expanded the protection of mangrove areas, established a marine park and facilitated species conservation through habitat restoration and species recovery programmes. With the goal to become a Zero Waste Nation, Singapore is also adopting a circular economy approach and a comprehensive waste management system to minimise land-based sources of litter in the oceans and marine environment.

Slovenia as maritime state is proactively committed to preserving healthy coastal and marine ecosystems in particular on the Adriatic Sea and in the broader Mediterranean region. Slovenia's marine biodiversity is amongst the world richest, with 98.5 % of marine areas under protection. Furthermore, with its active involvement in the protection of cetaceans, Slovenia is highly devoted to the conservation of ocean inhabitants that go far beyond national borders.

The UAE’s diverse marine habitats are a mainstay of the country’s flourishing fishing and tourism industries. The UAE has designated 16 marine protected areas that account for 12 percent of its marine and coastal territory. These areas play a major role in the conservation of endangered species. Additional efforts to protect marine life include a program targeting the rehabilitation of marine and coastal habitats, as well as assessment and mapping of marine ecosystem services.

2020 is poised to be a significant year for the world’s oceans. The decisions taken this year can determine the state of our marine ecosystems at the end of the century. The need of the hour is to balance economic growth with ocean health.

Financing the transition to a sustainable blue economy remains a key issue. We need to mobilize private and public funds at a much larger scale. A “greening” of the financial system would facilitate this path. The world’s first blue bond, launched by the Seychelles in 2018, has opened the door for ocean finance, and there are opportunities to learn from the experience of green finance as investment takes hold.

Meanwhile, we remain committed to halting and reversing the decline in the health and productivity of our ocean and its ecosystems and to protecting and restoring its resilience and ecological integrity. We must continue to explore new ways to safeguard and sustainably use our oceans – reducing our carbon footprint, promoting seafood from sustainable sources, and cutting down on plastic pollution. And collective action is the only way we can achieve our common goal.

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