



**PERMANENT MISSION OF JAMAICA  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**REMARKS BY**

**MS. SHORNA-KAY RICHARDS  
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE  
OF JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**AT THE**

**GLOBAL OCEAN COMMISSION SIDE EVENT**

**“THE OCEAN WE NEED FOR THE FUTURE WE WANT”**

**21<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2015  
UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK**

**Co-Chair David Miliband**  
**Ambassador Lisa Svensson**  
**Mr. Max Diener**  
**Distinguished colleagues**

Let me begin by commending the Global Ocean Commission and the Government of Sweden for organising this timely side event and for inviting me to address you on the importance of an implementing agreement for Jamaica and other SIDS and how we came to this conclusion. Before doing so, I take this opportunity to warmly congratulate the Global Ocean Commission on its landmark report which has not only raised the profile of global oceans issues but has provided a valuable contribution to deliberations here at the United Nations, both within the context Sustainable Development Goals process and the BBNJ Working Group.

So why is an implementing agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction important for the future of SIDS and our people? Why have we consistently called for swift and decisive action to address the myriad threats posed, particularly climate change and ocean acidification, to the world's oceans? In two words: development and survival. Our viability and very survival are intrinsically linked with the vast expanses of the ocean. We depend on the ocean for our food, livelihoods and employment. Moreover, SIDS are often the first to feel the effects of global environmental problems, due to their often small size, isolated locations, and vulnerability to climate change. As Ambassador Ronny Jumeau, Seychelles Ambassador for Climate Change and SIDS puts it "such a lopsided dependence on oceans and seas is repeated across the SIDS in every ocean." So, we have a unique dependency on the health of global oceans and marine resources, and as custodian of vast ocean resources we must take ownership of strategies concerning the sustainable development of oceans.

Indeed, the importance of oceans to SIDS' survival and sustainable development is best summed up in paragraph 53 of the SAMOA Pathway – the outcome document of the Third International Conference on SIDS, held last September in Samoa. Allow me to read this paragraph: "Healthy, productive and resilient oceans and coasts are critical for, inter alia,

poverty eradication, access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, livelihoods, economic development and essential ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, and represent an important element of identity and culture for the people of small island developing States.”

Yet the reality we face is an ocean in distress: putting the survival and sustainable development of our people at risk. As the Co-chairs of the Global Ocean Commission stated in their letter of 24 June 2014, “our ocean is in decline: habitat destruction, biodiversity loss, overfishing, pollution, climate change and ocean acidification are pushing the ocean system to the point of collapse”.

SIDS are acutely aware that the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction is critical to the health of oceans. These areas or the international waters of the high seas as they are commonly called, lie beyond countries’ exclusive economic zones and belong to everyone. As we know, they constitute almost two-thirds of the world’s ocean and nearly 50 per percent of the planet’s surface, but are among the least protected areas on Earth. Currently, more than 99 per cent of the areas beyond national jurisdiction are unprotected; a situation which is being exacerbated by increasing human activity both in terms of scale and scope.

SIDS, therefore, recognize that that there is an urgent need to address ocean governance in a more holistic manner, to ensure that efforts to protect, conserve and share marine biological resources are given as much credence as efforts to secure the benefits of the non-living resources of the deep sea.

Furthermore, we are cognizant of the need for swift and decisive action to stem the unprecedented rate of loss of marine biodiversity. We are convinced that working together within the universal framework of the United Nations, we can halt this occurrence and create an enhanced form of ocean governance that results in integrated management and sustainable development of the oceans and seas, and the regulation of new and emerging maritime activities. This we believe is best achieved through an implementing agreement under UNCLOS.

Allow me to highlight two challenges that SIDS believe could be best addressed under such an agreement:

- Firstly, the existing measures to conserve marine biodiversity are grossly insufficient. As you are all aware, what passes for conservation measures in areas beyond national jurisdiction is an incoherent patchwork of regional and sectoral arrangements and institutions. What the Global Ocean Commission calls ‘organised catastrophe’. One consequence of this fragmentation is that management tools for marine biodiversity in ABNJ are not available. There is no mechanism to establish, for example, fully-protected high seas marine reserves. Nor is there a way to require that all ABNJ activities, be preceded by environmental impact assessments.
- Secondly, that there is an absence of a mechanism to ensure access to, and benefit-sharing of marine genetic resources in ABNJ. The genetic resources found in these areas form part of the last global commons, belonging to all States in equal measure. They include potentially valuable deep-sea genetic resources that may contribute to significant medical breakthroughs, such as anti-cancer drugs. Yet SIDS, and developing countries in general, lag far behind their developed country counterparts in realizing their benefits. 90 percent of patents derived from marine organisms have gone to only 10 developed countries. This is a situation where certain States now enjoy de facto sovereign rights over common resources by virtue of their advanced technologies and capacity.
- A related consideration for SIDS is that we have struggled to access ABNJ due to the lack of capacity and technology required to do so. Scientific research and the transfer of marine technology will be the foundation for sustainable use of resources in areas beyond national jurisdiction. It will also be a key development driver for States.

It is against this background that Jamaica and its fellow SIDS have been actively participating, through the Group of 77 and China, in the near decade-long deliberations in the General Assembly in support of urgent action to ensure the proper conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction. Moreover, SIDS have accorded a high level of political commitment and priority to this issue and have ensured that it is addressed at global, regional and sub-regional processes, meetings or initiatives directly or indirectly related to the oceans agenda, including the 2012 Rio+20 Summit; the G77 Ministerial meetings; and the Third International Conference for Small Island Developing States.

Quite rightly and indeed timely, SIDS have come to the conclusion that the development of an implementing agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is the best option to sustainably manage, conserve and exploit marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction. In particular, we are of the view that a new implementing agreement could assist with:

- tackling governance challenges;
- conserving high seas resources;
- providing access to benefit-sharing arrangements, including monetary and non-monetary benefits of marine genetic resources; and
- providing an opportunity to build partnerships in capacity building and transfer of marine technology

Last year was a pivotal year for SIDS. Indeed, Jamaica and its fellow SIDS partners seized the opportunity, within the context of the International Year of SIDS, the Third International SIDS Conference and the elaboration of a set of sustainable development goals, to bring global attention to their unique and particular vulnerabilities in meeting their sustainable development goals and aspirations. Protecting and sustainably managing the oceans featured prominently in these efforts.

Co-Chair Miliband, let me reiterate that SIDS fully share the view of the Global Ocean Commission that “saving the global ocean is one that no government or company or individual

can achieve alone". SIDS are onboard, we are part of "Ocean Mission". Thank you for lending valuable support to our efforts as detailed in Proposal 2 of the Commission's Rescue Package for the Global Ocean.

In closing, allow me to quote from an article published in the Economist last year entitled: *Governing the oceans: the tragedy of the high seas:*

"The law of the sea should be beefed up. It is a fine achievement, without which oceans would be in an even more worse state. But it was negotiated in the 1970s before the rise of environmental concerns, so contains little on biodiversity. Humanity has harmed the high seas but it can reverse that damage. After all, if the UN cannot promote the collective self-interest over individual interests of its members, what is it good for?"

If we do not halt and reverse the damage being done to the high seas today, it will be too late to mitigate the irreversible damage done to generations in the future. What looms as an existential threat to SIDS today is in fact a precursor to a catastrophe in the making for us all tomorrow.

It is for reason that this week, Jamaica and its fellow SIDS partners are ready to demonstrate that the UN is good for the protecting our ocean – our survival and sustainable development.