

The Honourable Deputy Prime Minister; Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs His Excellency Didier Reynders, Excellencies and colleagues; Invited guests; Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure and an honour for me to say a few words in my capacity as Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States. On behalf of my fellow colleagues from small island states, I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Government of Belgium and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO for organizing this workshop for Small Island Developing States. It is a timely event as an important contribution to the upcoming Preparatory Committee on developing a legally binding instrument on the conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction.

As you all know, the importance of these negotiations are paramount, as we are entering into another new era of progressive development of the law of the sea. During the negotiations in the Third UN Conference on the law of the sea, our knowledge was limited to the mere existence of the mineral resources in “the Area”. Following from these discussions, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea applied the principle of the common heritage of mankind to those resources and set up a governance framework. And today, the progression in science and technology has revealed the vast potential that the biodiversity of marine ecosystem has to offer for humanity, in terms of development and economic growth.

However, the ability or capacity of countries to make the best use of this potential is not equal. Therefore, the emergence of a fair and equitable

regime governing the biodiversity in those areas beyond national jurisdiction is better realized by none other than the Small Island Developing States. And I am pleased to note that the purpose of this workshop is to have further discussions on this issue precisely.

It is also important to acknowledge that SIDS are the stewards of large expanses of oceans and seas. Numerous areas beyond national jurisdiction are adjacent to our Exclusive Economic Zones and due to the interconnected nature of our oceans, any activities being undertaken in these areas often have a direct or indirect impact on the viability of our oceans, as well as our sustainable development. Therefore, our interests extend beyond just equitable sharing of benefits, and the process must ensure the inclusivity of SIDS. Thus the title of the workshop “Healthy Oceans, Resilient Islands” is most appropriate.

SIDS have highlighted the capacity restraints that member states face in engaging in the negotiating process in New York, and our need to have technical discussions at an expert level to enhance our interests in the negotiations.

In that regard, we recognize the special voluntary trust fund established under General Assembly Resolution 69/292 for the purpose of assisting developing countries, including small island developing States to attend the meetings of the Preparatory Committee and the intergovernmental conferences, which has now been operationalized.

In addition to this, we are extremely pleased and grateful that the Belgian Government and the IOC have heard our call and organized this workshop especially on the eve of the Third PrepCom. I am eager to hear from all the speakers, including my colleagues, as part of the rich agenda for this

Workshop, and hope to establish close working relationships with the experts for future collaboration as an outcome of this workshop.

In closing let me express my sincere appreciation to the Belgian Government for their generous hospitality in hosting this workshop in this beautiful country. We look forward to the exploratory trips which have been included in our agenda. In addition to the takeaways from the useful substantive discussions, I'm sure that all of us will be go back home with wonderful memories of our time here.

Thank you, Merci bu cou, Dank u.