

**Remarks by Mr. Felix Maonera, Head of the OACPS Geneva Office,  
during the 4<sup>th</sup> Oceans Forum on Trade-related aspects of  
Sustainable Development Goal 14**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the OACPS Secretary-General, HE Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti, I would like to express our pleasure to join our cooperating partners in this the 4<sup>th</sup> United Nations Oceans Forum, focusing on the trade-related targets of SDG 14.

The OACPS Secretariat welcomes the diverse actors and representative segments of the ocean economy who have been able to join the meeting – whether in person or online. Our commitment to inter-agency approaches and cooperation to accelerate the implementation of SDG 14 remains ever strong and ever necessary.

We are all agreed that the Ocean is a key life-support system for Planet Earth, for livelihoods and for economies. We are agreed too that pressures on the ocean and marine resources have increased significantly because of overfishing, pollution, and climate change. And we are also agreed on the need to act now to address the identified problems. It is in this context that one would have expected that by now we would be celebrating an agreement on fisheries subsidies negotiations at the WTO in line with one of our recommendations at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Oceans Forum held in 2019. A big part of

what we seek to achieve in the Oceans Forum is of course linked to a successful outcome in the WTO negotiations. We remain hopeful that members engaged in the WTO negotiations will reach agreement soon.

For the members and regions of the OACPS, fisheries and aquaculture remain important Ocean economy sectors. These sectors play a crucial and valuable role in underpinning the food and nutritional security, employment, exports trade and livelihoods of our 64 coastal States - 38 of which are Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

With 2022 having been designated the “International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture”, we are presented with an opportunity to raise awareness and catalyze commitments to shape appropriate policies, plans, and, above all, deliver concrete actions to create a better future for small-scale fisheries at community, national, regional, and intra-regional levels. Success will almost certainly allow us to deliver on a range of sustainable development goals, and to build resilience.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on our fishing industry, with significant disruptions in fisheries activities, decreased production, lost business opportunities, existing markets under threat, and declining revenues. The negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been well documented, by us and by others. For us in the OACPS, the pandemic highlighted the following in the context of the ocean economy:

- the importance of services that enable online supply, beyond just telecommunications and computer services, to the broader infrastructural role of financial, transport, distribution and logistics services in facilitating trade and economic growth;
- the need to bridge the digital divide;
- that countries can very quickly resort to restrictive measures that have a negative impact on the multilateral trading system;
- the importance of greater global cooperation in the production and distribution of essential products; and that,
- the economies of developing countries remain extremely vulnerable to shocks, requiring the building of greater preparedness and resilience.

It is our expectation that in the following sessions during this Forum, you will seek responses to some of the issues that the pandemic brought to the fore. Our message to you is that we should focus on finding solutions both for, and in, the small-scale fisheries sector. While this sector is one of the biggest employers of the ocean economy in the OACPS countries and regions – it is in a precarious and vulnerable state. Consequently, large numbers of dependent communities remain impoverished, vulnerable, and often, and for the most part, working under very unfavourable, and unacceptable conditions. Our priority going forward should be to support and transform fisheries and aquaculture value chains to be sustainable, resilient, and inclusive.

It would be remiss of me not to inform you that the 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of OACPS Ministers in charge of Fisheries and Aquaculture is taking place in Accra, Ghana, from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> of April. The expectation is that the meeting will yield concrete decisions that will give momentum to addressing OACPS key issues that are also being considered in this Forum. Infact, the OACPS Secretary-General is intimately involved in that meeting, and it is for this reason he could not be here with you today. He conveys his warmest wishes to you all for successful deliberations and outcomes at this 4<sup>th</sup> Oceans Forum – and wishes to pose the following challenge to us all, and that is, as we put together the usual recommendations at the end of this 4<sup>th</sup> Oceans Forum, we take a close look at what we have done to discharge the recommendations that we adopted at the previous three Oceans Forums.

I THANK YOU!