



Women in the Law of the Sea (WILOS) Conference, 26-28 September 2022

Malta Statement delivered by H.E. Vanessa Frazier
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Secretary-General

Excellency

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I want to emphasize how important it is for Malta to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the adoption of UNCLOS. As the 32nd President of the Meeting of States Parties to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, I welcome this Conference as a fantastic way to bring international expertise, particularly that of women, together to discuss the Convention and its many important elements.

The International Seabed Authority, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, the Office of Legal Affairs, and the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea all play important roles in the interpretation and implementation of the Convention. As do the States Parties to the Convention themselves, together with the 1994 Agreement related to deep seabed mining, and the 1995 Agreement relating to fish stocks.

I also want to mention the important role of multi-stakeholders, especially that of civil society - academia, scientists, research agencies, and NGOs in promoting the implementation of the Convention and the protection of the oceans and their biodiversity.

- Challenges remain: from climate change, marine pollution, and destructive fishing practices, to the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, as well as maritime security. The Convention's framework remains the key to addressing these challenges, as it set forth the comprehensive framework governing uses of the ocean.

One of the challenges that this conference itself addresses is the important role that women have in the Law of the Sea. The full, equal, meaningful and **effective** participation of women in the Law of the Sea must remain a priority for us all.



Critical gender perspectives are needed, even in an area such as Law of the Sea which may seem to be a gender-neutral set of rules, applicable to States. We live at a time when the presence and contribution of women in maritime activities is constantly increasing. This applies at all levels: in international organizations relevant to ocean governance; government Ministries and agencies; the private sector, academia and civil society; in fishing, mining, sea-related industries, activities for the protection of biodiversity and science. Enhancing gender equality and the empowerment of women at sea is a necessity for the Law of the Sea to be more inclusive, and to remain responsive to today's needs.

The legal rules on the sea have direct effects on the lives of communities and individuals. For this reason, we cannot have this discussion without a focus on the nexus between climate change and the oceans. Climate change has negative effects on States, biodiversity and, as a result, on the livelihoods of people, in particularly those in more vulnerable communities. This includes the women and girls in those communities, and gender responsive approaches are required to effectively deal with these challenges.

At the regional level, the European Union recognises the important role of women in relation to ocean governance. **Projects focusing on “Women in the Blue Economy”** will be financed to help increase the participation of women in the different sectors of the blue economy, such as fisheries, aquaculture, shipbuilding, maritime transport, offshore renewable energy, blue bioeconomy, as well as inland and offshore aquaculture. For our part, Malta is proud to host the UN's International Maritime Law Institute (IMLI). For years now, IMLI has ensured fever equity within its student body thus encouraging governments to nominate women to study in this Institute. The objective is to overcome the existing constraints in all aspects of the maritime sector, in particular recruitment, training, capacity-building, technical cooperation and promotions, so that every person can fully and safely participate in the activities of the sustainable blue economy. The actions will help sustainable blue economy sectors to embrace a deep and structural change to facilitate the inclusion of women in the wider maritime economy, thus contributing to a more gender equal society as a whole.

But much more needs to be done!

During SPLOS in June I encouraged States Parties to further promote gender equality.

The numbers highlight this need. For the SPLOS Bureau, there have been 60 total positions available since 2010, 19 have gone to women. Since the establishment of the CLCS, there have been 6 elections, with 21 seats each. Out of 126 seats, 3 have gone to women. The first women members were elected in 2017, meaning there were no women elected at all to the CLCS between 1997 and 2017, then two in 2017. And one woman was elected this year. No woman has



ever been elected as a Chair or Vice Chairs of the Commission, and only one woman as Chair of a Sub-commission. Currently, for ITLOS, out of the 21 members only 5 are women.

I am speaking now not only as the President of SPLOS, but also as a woman and proud and active International Gender Champion. This is something which I encourage all to do more for, and this encouragement applies to my own State – Malta – as well. We can only reach true inclusion of women in all their diversity if we all commit to it, each and every one of us.

And the agenda set for the Conference is proof that there are plenty of women who are internationally recognized for their expertise. Whether they are civil servants, Professors, serve on international tribunals, or even serve in military positions, their contribution to ocean governance is essential.

I am delighted to see so many accomplished women gather together to contribute to a conference dedicated to detailed discussions of the Convention. The Convention is *the* overarching legal framework within which all activities in oceans and seas must be carried out. A gender responsive approach enhances its objectives of being a legal order for the seas and oceans which takes into account the interests and needs of all mankind.

I thank you.