

**Check Against Delivery**



**REPUBLIC OF VANUATU**

**NATIONAL STATEMENT**

**INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY COUNCIL MEETING, 16-31 MARCH 2023**

**Delivered by Sylvain KALSAKAU**

**27 March 2023**

Thank you, Mr. President.

At the outset, please allow me to thank the Government and people of Jamaica for hosting us and for their gracious hospitality. Allow me again to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election. We have full confidence in your leadership.

The Republic of Vanuatu is committed to ensuring effective protection of the ocean. We shall continue to engage actively in the negotiations of the Rules, Regulations and Procedures of the International Seabed Authority.

As a Small Island Developing State at the extreme frontlines of the impacts of climate change including impacts on the ocean, Vanuatu is concerned about additional pressures on the ocean from other anthropogenic activities.

Vanuatu is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. We have been rated as the world's most at-risk country for natural disasters owing to our geography. The ocean is of special importance to us. Vanuatu, like other Pacific Islands, depends on the ocean for everything – including climate and food security and for our health. It is intrinsically interwoven in the fabric of our cultures. The oceans health is our biggest hope for sustainable development.

Mr. President, we join the growing international call for a precautionary pause on deep-sea mining to protect our ocean, and we align ourselves with the Member States of the International Seabed Authority who are making this call.

There are different terms, we wish to reiterate, including 'precautionary pause' and 'moratorium' that are being used in this context. We are of the view that what matters is the action that is taken under these approaches rather than what they are called, as was previously highlighted by the Distinguished Delegate of the Federated States of Micronesia.

We acknowledge the leadership and stand with those in our Pacific family - Palau, Fiji, Samoa, and the Federated States of Micronesia - who were the first to take a stance against deep-sea mining on the international stage.

The Clarion- Clipperton Zone is the area currently targeted for exploitation and we in the Pacific will be the first to feel the impacts and to be put at the greatest risk.

Therefore, we encourage our fellow Pacific States who have expressed interest in deep-sea mining to step back from the brink, and instead, to collaborate with us in taking a precautionary approach as a region, and as a world.

Mr. President, science has provided some evidence that deep-sea mining would result in considerable and possible irreversible harm to the unique and diverse ecosystems present in the deep sea, and even lead to extinction of species.

Deep-sea mining would go beyond harming the seabed and have a wider impact on fish populations, marine mammals, and the essential function of the deep-sea ecosystems in regulating the climate.

### **Vanuatu's priorities**

Mr. President, given the lack of robust scientific information available on deep sea ecosystems and biodiversity, and given the considerable and possible irreversible harm that deep-sea mining would have on the ocean, the Republic of Vanuatu has the following priorities:

First, Vanuatu strongly supports the growing international call for a precautionary pause on deep-sea mining. We call on all Member States to join us. In the same vein, Vanuatu is happy to join a growing coalition of States calling for a partnership for the deep sea and we encourage all Member States to join.

Secondly, we are of the view that the mining regulations should not be adopted until we have robust scientific baseline information and comprehensive understanding of

the deep-sea ecosystems and biodiversity and the impacts of deep-sea mining and until it can be guaranteed that there will be no loss of biodiversity and no harm to the marine environment.

Third, we urge all Member States to come together to prevent the granting of mining contracts. Given the irreversible harm that deep-sea mining will have on the ocean ecosystems and biodiversity, granting a mining contract would be contrary to our international commitments for the protection of biodiversity and nature.

Fourth, we are convinced that deep-sea mining is not a sustainable solution to the challenges we are facing today – we cannot call this a ‘clean transition’ or a ‘green transition’ if it is coming at the cost of nature and biodiversity. In this regard, we urge all Member States to align with the Global Biodiversity Framework recently adopted at the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP15 in Montreal as well the agreed text on Conservation and Sustainable use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ).

Finally, we call upon the ISA and Member States to ensure transparency and equitable participation of all States and other stakeholders including civil society, academia, women and youth groups, coastal communities, and local and indigenous communities. In this regard, the inclusion of Indigenous voices that we heard last week, which we are grateful for, demonstrates that we need a wider and more effective inclusion of diverse stakeholders to meet the Authority’s obligation to act on behalf of humankind as a whole.

Mr. President, before I conclude, please allow me to make a small announcement. Vanuatu along with a Core Group of States have finalised the UN Resolution to request an Advisory Opinion on Climate Change from the International Court of Justice. The official date of adoption of the resolution is confirmed for 10 AM on Wednesday, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2023 at the United Nations General Assembly Hall in New York. This resolution and the Advisory Opinion on Climate Change that it seeks from the International Court of Justice, will play a critical role in clarifying the rights and obligations of States with respect to Climate Change, and make a significant contribution towards protecting the rights of the present and future generations from the adverse impacts of Climate Change.

Distinguished leaders and fellow delegates, we need your leadership and political efforts to save the world’s largest climate regulator. You can count on Vanuatu’s support.

I thank you.