

AFRICAN UNION COMMEMORATES THE AFRICAN DAY OF SEAS AND OCEANS

Mahe, Seychelles, 6th August 2021- The commemoration of the 2021 edition of African Day of Seas and Oceans was held in Mahe, Republic of Seychelles under the theme *transforming the challenges of African seas and oceans into opportunities*.

Given the objective of raising awareness on the critical role played by Africa's oceans and seas in attaining sustainable development within the framework of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the commemoration event was organized by the African Union Commission, through its Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (ARBE) in collaboration with the the Government of Seychelles. The event also provided an opportunity to reflect on opportunities and challenges facing Africa's resources in its Oceans, Seas, Rivers and Lakes and deliberated on appropriate policy and institutional responses.

In his keynote address H.E Mr. Wavel Ramkalawan, President of the Republic of Seychelles and African Union Champion for Blue Economy Called for a push for continued scientific research; for oceans and seas not only to have ecological, nutritional and economic values, but also to recognise their role as key climate regulators that influence global weather systems.

The President also emphasised on the importance of greater education programmes in getting communities to attach greater values and respect to Africa's seas and oceans and the need to transform the minds of future generations and make the youth of tomorrow the guardians of these important assets.

"Our nations need to know the ripple effects of human interventions specially when there is over exploitation and sustainability is threatened. Our 'blue' blind spot or ocean-related scientific knowledge gaps need to be filled." He added.

Under its first Aspiration: "*A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development*", Agenda 2063 recognizes the huge potential of the Blue Economy as a catalyst of socio-economic transformation through knowledge of marine and aquatic biotechnology, the growth of an Africa-wide shipping industry, the development of sea, river and lake transport and fishing; and exploitation and benefits from deep sea mineral and other resources. It also takes into account the marine environmental protection that includes the methods and strategies to combat climate change. "We need to wake up, be inspired and willing to see Africa grow and chart its own path as envisioned in Agenda 2063", emphasized Hon. Jean François Ferrari, Minister designate for Fisheries and Blue Economy, Government of Seychelles in his keynote address.

H.E Amb. Josefa Sacko, Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (ARBE) pointed out Africa's legacy with

massive aquatic and marine resources including oceans, seas, rivers and lakes which are potential for the development of blue economy in the continent. “The huge opportunities around Africa’s Blue Economy can change the narrative for the continent as an engine for socio-economic development and industrialization. It can further create job opportunities and improve livelihoods for the teeming population in the continent, particularly for women and youth”, Commissioner Sacko added.

Amb. Sacko also raised the potential threats around Africa’s blue economy development regardless of its benefits and opportunities associated with the aquatic resources of the continents vast oceans, seas and inland waters. “Africa’s Blue Economy potential is however under serious threats largely due to governance, capacity issues, pollution through dumping of toxic waste, indiscriminate discarding of single use plastics, oil spills, environmental degradation of the marine environment, unsustainably managed rapid urban and industrial growth resulting in the heavy pollution of oceans loss of biodiversity, Illegal trafficking, illegal unreported, unregulated (IUU) and indiscriminate fishing, Transnational Organized Crimes; Weak governance and political leadership, she pointed out. The challenges also include: Climate change and vulnerability to extreme weather events, overfishing, coupled with threats to maritime security, which are significant challenges that we must overcome.

Africa currently has more than 12 million people engaged in fishing sector alone, providing food security and nutrition for nearly 200 million people and generating an estimated value of USD 24 billion annually, which represents 1.26% of the GDP of African Countries.

The AU Summit Decision **Assembly/AU/Dec. 496(XXII)** retained the 2015-2025 decade as the “Decade of African Seas and Oceans” and the date of 25 July for the commemoration of the African Day of Seas and Oceans. The 2019 and 2020 editions were postponed due to unforeseen circumstance in 2019 and COVID-19 in 2020.

Learn more about Africa Blue Economy Strategy on: https://www.au-ibar.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/sd_20200313_africa_blue_economy_strategy_en.pdf

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