

AFRICAN UNION

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STATEMENT

BY

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DEVELOPMENT, BLUE ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE
ENVIRONMENT (ARBE)**

AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

**COMMEMORATION OF THE 2021 EDITION OF AFRICAN
DAY OF SEAS AND OCEANS**

BY VIRTUAL

6 AUGUST 2021

PROTOCOL

- **Your Excellency, Mr. Wavel Ramkalawan, President of the Republic of Seychelles and African Union Champion for Blue Economy**
- **Honourable Ministers**
- **Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of Member States to the African Union**
- **Representatives of the AU Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Regional institution and Development Partners**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps**
- **Distinguished Delegates, Invited Participants and Members of the Media and Press**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Dignitaries, Delegations, Participants, devotees/supporters of the seas and oceans, workers, actually to all African citizens, welcome to the commemoration of the 2021 Edition of the African Day of the Seas and Oceans.

It is a pleasure and honour for me to deliver this statement of the African Union Commission at this splendid occasion taking place today, Friday, 6th of August 2021. Permit me, from the outset to convey the warm greetings of H.E. Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission to Your Excellency, Mr. President and to all the dignitaries present at this joyous occasion.

In same vein, I wish to also express our congratulations to Your Excellency Mr. Wavel Ramkalawan, President of the Republic of Seychelles and AU Champion on Blue Economy and to the government and people of Seychelles for the joint organization of this remarkable celebration. It is an attestation of the great commitment of Seychelles to advance Blue Economy in the African continent.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, I wish to further acknowledge the large turnout, which is a living testimony that like the waters connect the people, this virtual tools due to the global pandemic has provided an opportunity for us to gather on the theme: ‘Transforming the challenges of African Seas and Oceans.’ The theme actually resonates with the context of the AU theme of the Year 2021: “Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building an African We Want.”

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Africa is endowed with massive aquatic and marine resources including oceans, seas, rivers and lakes with potential for blue economy growth. The continent has 38 coastal States and a number of Island States that collectively encompass vast ocean territories of an estimated 13 million square kilometers (km²). There are also substantial transboundary rivers and lakes in Africa with water bodies and wetlands that are of strategic importance as they provide opportunities for fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, coastal tourisms, offshore oil and gas energy mobilization and other blue economy related activities. 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 jobs and improve livelihoods for the teeming population in the continent and in particular the women and youth.

Distinguished Delegates, Despite these benefits and opportunities associated with the aquatic resources of our 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 (including the recent scourge of plastic pollution and maritime waste caused by discarded Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), loss of biodiversity, Illegal trafficking, illegal unreported, unregulated (IUU) and indiscriminate fishing, Transnational Organized Crimes; Weak governance and political leadership. 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. Furthermore, we have been impeded by the slow pace of development of ocean science across the continent and access to ocean data, as well as limited access to blue finance. Disregarding these challenges will accordingly hamper the growth potential promised by Africa's oceans and enormous coastline, which is estimated at almost 1 trillion US Dollars per yearⁱ.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, The African Union in a bid to address these challenges established various pan African instruments and declaration namely;

1. Integrated Maritime Strategy 2050 adopted in 2012. The Strategy stressed the importance for the African countries to pay greater attention to their maritime interests.
2. The Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS).
3. The 2016 Lomé Charter, which encouraged African States to coordinate efforts in order to address maritime security, safety and development.
4. Above all these instruments is the Africa's blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future – the African Union Agenda 2063: 'The Africa we want.'

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, I am therefore delighted to inform you at this juncture that the African Union Commission commenced the operationalization of the new reform from January 2021 as we now have a full-fledged Directorate of Sustainable Environment and Blue Economy (SEBE) that is fully taking on board the coordination

of the tasks on Blue Economy including Ocean Governance Framework and Action Plan. The new Directorate is therefore implementing the Africa's Blue Economy Strategy, which was endorsed by the 3rd Session of Specialized Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment (STC, ARDWE) held in October 2019 to support our Member States and regional institutions to effectively address the critical challenges to blue economy growth. To recall, the strategy focusses on five critical thematic areas as follows:

1. Fisheries, aquaculture and ecosystems conservation
2. Shipping, transportation and trade
3. Sustainable energy, extractive minerals, gas, innovative industries
4. Environmental sustainability, climate change and coastal infrastructure
5. Governance, Institutions and social actions

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Last week, the UN Food Systems Summit held in Rome discussed the urgent need to address rising food insecurity and food shortages compounded by the pandemic. Again, our oceans and seas were perceived to be part of the solution. “Blue foods”, namely foods derived from aquatic sources, have a key role to play in addressing protein deficits across the continent, and it is encouraging that many countries in Africa have well-established or emerging sectors on fisheries and seafood, aquaculture and seaweed/algae production.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Lastly, I wish reiterate the resolute commitment of the AU Commission to continue to support our Member States and RECs as we advance on Blue Economy. The African Union Commission stands fully ready to assist. In addition, as we

move towards the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention of Biological Diversity (COP15) in Kunming, China, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP26 in Glasgow, United Kingdom, the health of our oceans, seas, rivers and lakes must be placed at the centre stage. Many African countries, including the Seychelles and Gabon, have already shown their commitment to ambitious targets for protecting their marine resources. Such efforts on the continent should be underpinned by strong commitment to devote resources, good political will and finance. It is my hope that our development partners will sustain their efforts towards this endeavour. Furthermore, the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) also promises to stimulate the potential of blue economy. The African Green Stimulus Programme and the African Green Recovery Action Plan, among other initiatives, include blue economy as a pivotal element for supporting AU Member States and RECs in rebuilding their economies.

Lastly, I wish all of us a happy celebration on the commemoration of the 2021 Edition of the African Day of Seas and Oceans.

I thank you all for your kind attention.

Obrigado! Merci beaucoup! Muchas Gracias! Shukran! Asante sana!

ⁱ <https://theconversation.com/how-african-countries-can-harness-the-huge-potential-of-their-oceans-77889>