Statement at the Opening Plenary of the Second Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for an Internationally Legally Binding Instrument to Address Plastic Pollution, including in the Marine Environment  
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Thematic Area: General Statement (item 4)

Mr. Chair,
I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the 14 Pacific Small Island Developing States, and we align ourselves with the statement made by Samoa on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States. At the onset, we express our sincere gratitude to France for hosting us, and to you Chair and Secretariat of the INC for the support provided during the intersession, and all the hard work and preparation for INC-2.

The Pacific region is world-renowned for pristine beaches, turquoise waters, vibrant forests and colourful reefs. While the postcards remain, the qualifier “pristine” is, unfortunately, no longer accurate due to the exorbitant amounts of plastic that are floating into our waters from other countries and onto our shores. Our most remote beaches, the once pristine reefs, and our deepest trenches are now contaminated with plastic pollution. In addition to the impact on our environment, scientists are reporting concerning amounts of microplastics in fish and human exposure to certain harmful plastic additives. These result in harmful health effects on humans, in areas of fertility and so forth.

Mr. Chair,
Pacific Island countries contribute less than 1.3% of the 14 million tonnes of plastic pollution that ends up in the marine environment. We are ocean people and view ourselves as the custodians of the Pacific Ocean, and we believe it is imperative that this instrument includes robust measures to prevent and tackle plastic pollution in the marine environment, consistent with UNEA Resolution 5/14. This is not just for our benefit, but also for the international community, which relies on the Pacific region for the majority of the global seafood trade, including 60% of the global tuna trade.
We need to be ambitious in our efforts in this treaty if we are to leave the legacy of a cleaner planet for future generations. We call to reduce the global production, use and discharge of plastics across their life cycle, including through the promotion of a safe, circular economy to end plastic pollution by 2040 and protect human health and the environment from its adverse effects. We must consider banning problematic and avoidable plastic products, microplastics and chemicals of concern. As noted by the UNEP Executive Secretary, “We cannot recycle our way out of this”.

The PSIDS strongly believe that the entire lifecycle of plastic needs to be captured in this instrument and that mandatory measures can and should be undertaken to accelerate the speed at which we reduce plastic pollution towards a goal to end it by 2040. In our view, the lifecycle starts from the sourcing of raw materials all the way to the remediation of legacy pollution.

Making the treaty work will be dependent on the ambitions we set both in terms of obligations and measures, and the means to implement such provisions. Since 1992, SIDS have been recognized as a special case for sustainable development in light of our special circumstances, in light of our unique vulnerabilities, including our small size, remoteness, narrow resource and export base, and vulnerability to global environmental challenges and external economic shocks. In this treaty, we emphasise the critical importance of taking these into account.

Mr Chair,
If we continue on our current trajectory, ocean plastic pollution will quadruple by 2050; in addition to plastic pollution, we bear the negative effects of carbon emission from virgin plastic creation. This is our moment to catalyze the transformation for a cleaner planet. With little time left to negotiate such a complex treaty, we will soon need to shift gears and start text-based discussions to progress on our mandate. We look forward to constructive engagement with all members and stakeholders during this INC with a view to providing you sufficient basis to start developing a zero-draft to guide the next phase of this INC.

It is an honour to work with all of you in addressing one of the most pressing issues of our generation. We look forward to collaborating, exchanging views and working together towards a robust, ambitious and legally binding instrument with a view to ending plastic pollution by 2040.

Thank you.