Mr President,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum Member States represented at the UN, namely, Australia, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my own nation, Palau.

I speak on behalf of a region that is more than 98% ocean and sprawls across 40 million square kilometers of the planet. The ocean is our way of life. It is our livelihood, our economy and our culture. It has shaped the people and nations that we are today and it will determine our future.

However, in our lifetime we have witnessed a combination of human impacts that are destroying our ocean. Overfishing, pollution, coastal runoff and other stressors have all weakened our marine ecosystems. Compounding these pressures, global carbon emissions are causing warming and acidification and are grave threats that threaten the very foundation of our life and future.

That is why all of us have worked tirelessly to craft a stand-alone goal on Oceans. As we head into the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals on January 1, 2016, we call upon all nations to support Goal 14 to ‘conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development’.
The theme of the annual meeting of Pacific Islands Forum Leaders held in Palau this year was “The Ocean: Life and Future”. This sends a strong message to the world about our priorities. Leaders unanimously endorsed the Palau Declaration, calling for increased action and integrated approaches to sustainable development, management and conservation of our ocean. This will build on the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape which was endorsed by our Leaders in 2010 and is experiencing momentum particularly in the area of conservation, through the creation of marine protected areas and sanctuaries. We are very proud of the recent commitments made by Australia, Cook Islands, Kiribati, New Zealand and the Republic of Palau.

We note that Palau’s President, His Excellency Tommy Remengesau who is also the current Chair of Pacific Islands Forum, announced this year his intention to establish the Palau National Marine Sanctuary. This nationwide marine sanctuary would protect 193,000 square miles, representing 80 percent of the country’s exclusive economic zone. As a result of his efforts, he was recently awarded the Champions of the Earth Award, the UN’s top environmental award.

Marine protected areas are just one of many tools available to safeguard the health of our ocean for future generations. Measures to enforce fishing limits, increase the rate of return from fishing activities, formalize maritime boundaries, reduce pollution and tackle climate change have all been key components of the region’s efforts.

Mr President,

We in the Pacific are the custodians of the largest remaining healthy fishery in the world. Yet, in any given year, only 5-8% of the fisheries revenue generated from the Exclusive Economic Zones of Pacific Small Island Developing States by the distant water fishery nations comes back to them as custodians and resource owners. This is not right. It has to change and we are working to change this. We believe there should be more equity and justice in the business partnership between the private fishing industry and the resource owners and custodians. We seek sustainable and durable partnerships to enhance Pacific Small Island Developing States ability to harvest their own resources for we believe that the true value of this resource can provide the much needed financial security to help the countries in the region address sustainable development challenges. Better business partnerships will support existing efforts and could also include building and strengthening fisheries management regimes, tackling the problems of overfishing and Illegal, Unreported & Unregulated (IUU) fishing, and improving monitoring and surveillance.
Mr President,

This year, we witnessed the successful conclusion of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States. We must maintain the energy and momentum we saw in Apia. In this regard, we welcomed the commitment of partners to work with Small Island Developing States to fully implement the conference outcome document entitled "Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action" (SAMOA Pathway), which includes oceans and seas as a priority area for action.

We also welcomed this year's robust debate on strengthening management of sharks. In our region, many shark species have been overfished and some are additionally threatened by habitat loss and pollution. At least 80 species of sharks and rays occur in our region and some of our members, including my own nation, have declared, and are setting in place, many of the world's strongest shark protection measures, and its largest sanctuary zones. The Pacific Islands Regional Plan of Action on Sharks demonstrates the strong regional commitment to conservation and management of sharks. We are pleased that this year's sustainable fisheries resolution explicitly recognizes that the practice of removing shark fins and discarding the carcasses at sea is a matter of concern. The spotlight was cast upon this odious practice in part through the active involvement of the UN Save our Sharks Coalition chaired by Ambassador Elliston Rahming of Bahamas.

We recognize the importance of international cooperation to improve the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond national jurisdiction. Pacific Island Forum Members welcome the progress made in 2014 at the UN working group dedicated to this issue and we reaffirm our support for the negotiation of an implementing agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Mr. President,

National efforts are not enough to heal the Ocean. Member States of the Pacific Islands Forum reiterate our call to the international community to take action to ensure sustainable development, management and conservation of our most precious resources through passage of Goal 14. We are in a unique time of history and this is the year for decisive action.

Thank you.