

World Ocean Day Side Event



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8 June 2023

UN Head Quarters, Conference Room 7, New York, USA

Hosted by the Permanent Missions of Sierra Leone and South Africa to the United Nations in collaboration with the Institute for Security Studies

Background and Purpose:

The United Nations marks World Oceans Day each year on 8 June through an event coordinated by the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (Office of Legal Affairs). This provides an opportunity to celebrate the ocean's importance and better understand how to interact sustainably with it. The 2023 theme is [Planet Ocean: Tides Are Changing](#).

At a time when global leaders seem divided on several issues, the agreement reached in March 2023 to protect marine biodiversity in the High Seas is a rare and significant triumph for global cooperation - a point emphasised by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres when he declared the treaty a 'victory for multilateralism.' African countries, coordinated by the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) and in other significant groupings such as the G77+China, also played an essential role in reaching this goal.

African countries' support is crucial for the effectiveness of the High Seas Treaty agreement. With 54 African states represented at the UN, Africa is the UN's largest regional voting bloc and has a strong legacy of ocean governance leadership and can facilitate its implementation. The agreement requires bold action from national leaders for a collaborative framework.

The event aims to raise awareness about the vital role of African countries in negotiations and the need for ratification and implementation. African countries, individually and collectively under the AU and RECs, must join the efforts to bring the agreement into force and maximise benefits for the continent and the planet.

Protecting marine biodiversity in the High Seas has a nexus to the delimitation of maritime boundaries. With the growing significance of developing Africa's blue economy, there could be an increase in maritime disputes in Africa due to unclear boundaries and national jurisdictions. These disputes may involve conflicts over ownership of vital economic resources. To resolve such issues, the International Court of Justice and the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) will have significant roles to play.

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The ISS, collaborating with the Permanent Missions of Sierra Leone and South Africa, will hold a World Ocean Day (8 June) side event at the UN HQ in New York. The event will consist of a panel discussion involving the African Group of Negotiators (AGN), international law jurists and representatives of the scientific community and civil society. They will jointly address relevant issues pertaining to dispute resolution and peaceful settlement that confront African countries as they further develop and implement their maritime strategies and policies.

Participants will also deliberate and determine tangible next steps for building consensus among member states to ratify the High Seas Treaty as early as possible and assess what capacity gaps and support are required to ensure early ratification of the treaty.

This will provide states, international organisations, and civil society with improved knowledge that encourages greater participation by African states in nascent global maritime governance institutions.

Proposed Structure:

Date: 8 June

Time: 1:15- 3:15 (EST)

Moderator: Ahmde Lahmiri, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Morocco to the UN and Lead Capacity Building and Transfer of Marine Technology, African Group of Negotiators for the BBNJ Treaty

Opening Statements:

1. Ambassador Alhaji Fanday Turay, Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations
2. Ambassador Mathu Joyini, Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations

Speakers:

1. Advocate Thembile Joyini – Legal Advisor, Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), Republic of South Africa
2. Ambassador Osman Keh Kamara – Special Advisor for the African Union - Silencing the Guns Initiative
3. Mr Timothy Walker- Maritime Project Lead and Senior Researcher, Institute for Security Studies
4. Ms Tamara Thomas, Adviser, Republic of Seychelles BBNJ Delegation

5. **Concluding remarks:** Dr Fonteh Akum, Executive Director, Institute for Security Studies

Format/Scenario:

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The event will be open to all UN Member States and accredited civil society. The event will consist of a panel discussion, followed by interventions by participants from UN Member States and accredited civil society, time permitting. The event will be conducted in English only (interpretation services are not available). Enquiries: David Willima, Phone: +27 62 65 66 346, Email: dwillima@issafrica.org