

Speech by Deputy Minister Rejoice Mabudafhasi

Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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Thank you for inviting me to make a contribution to this very significant event at this COP.

It is my hope today that my contribution will impact on the broader deliberations of this meeting. I attempt to remind us of how we cannot delink Oceans and Climate Change, and why this is of particular importance to us in the southern part of Africa.

THE OCEANS SERVE US.

Yes, this is true for the planet in the broadest of meanings. With the ocean making up about 70% of the earth surface, the oceans must drive the natural environment and biosphere functioning.

But that THE OCEANS SERVE US, is also very specifically true for South Africa and the region.

South Africa and the southern African region is bounded by the Indian Ocean on the East, the Atlantic Ocean on the West and these systems are impacted on by the South Oceans that lie between the southern tip of the continent and Antarctica.

Our climate and weather regimes are dictated by the very large areas of ocean that borders us. Our livelihoods, well being, food and economic security are in significant ways provided for by the ocean ecosystem functioning. When global statistics inform us that 50% of the world population live on the coast, this includes South and southern Africa. The climate and weather regimes are directly and immediately linked to our societies.

Very often heavy and expensive investment in technology, imports of raw materials and large amounts of processing of raw materials delinks communities' vulnerabilities from environmental vulnerabilities.

This is not often the case in the region that I live. For us the environment and people livelihoods are very immediately linked. And when these environments are dominated by oceans, then peoples livelihoods and oceans well being are integrally linked.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my point is that coastal countries access to adaptation resources is limited and we are vulnerable. Our people and their ability to sustain their way of providing for themselves and their security over the natural elements are at risk.

But there exist logical and achievable areas of potential success. During my participation in the Convention on Biological Diversity, in October this year, hosted so successfully by Japan, I again appreciated the advancing understanding of how oceans and climate and climate change are linked. The oceans are regarded as the largest active carbon sink, but I also understood that coastal wetlands are very efficient carbon sinks as well.

Ocean and Coastal pristine habitats and ecosystems, including coral reefs, estuaries, tidal salt marshes, mangroves, kelp forests and sea grasses, are global assets that my country and region can effectively manage to sustain this important ecosystem service.

The wise management of ocean and coastal ecosystems not only has benefits to the climate change initiatives but also importantly shares benefits that include food security and other positive contributions to livelihoods.

Here at this meeting and in the operations of individual countries environmental management agencies, we must seek to find and achieve these co-benefits.

These are however massive threats that climate change presents to ocean and coastal ecosystems. The unlimited increase of carbon di-oxide in the atmosphere will lead to ever increasing carbon in the ocean, leading to the

acidification of the oceans. The oceans becoming more acidic, critically threatens the functioning of these marine habitats that are so effective at taking up atmospheric carbon. In addition it exposes already fragile livelihoods to a future that presents very little hope of a relationship with the sea.

Before I end, I must address one caution. Over the last decade I have witnessed, with satisfaction, the growth in the appreciation of the oceans as the life-support system of our planet. This is due in part through efforts of people who have remained committed to raising the profile of oceans, coasts and islands, like Biliiana Cincin-Sain and the Global Forum on Oceans & Islands.

In our realization of the environmental support that the oceans afford the planet we must not seek "quick fix" solutions. There must be extreme caution exercised in discussions on ocean fertilization and ocean geo-engineering.

I have emphasised earlier, that as part of the developing world, so much of our people are immediately linked to the functions of the environment and oceans. We will directly receive the undiluted impact of any unforeseen and unintended negative consequences of large scale ocean fertilization or geo-engineering.

My plea again, is that while we must equitably realise all the potential of the oceans, we must not irresponsibly alter the functioning of natural systems, without appreciating the full range of impacts.

Thank You