

# Leveraging Africa's leadership on Ocean Governance and Blue Economy: Fostering a strengthened Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership

Co-hosts:



Government of Comoros



Government of Seychelles



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*"We know that restoring harmony with nature through a healthy, productive, sustainable, and resilient ocean is critical for our planet, our lives, and our future. We call upon all stakeholders to urgently take ambitious and concerted action to accelerate implementation to achieve Goal 14 as soon as possible without undue delay." (Lisbon Declaration)*

*"We reaffirm our will to promote blue economy at continental and regional levels and to accelerate the Great Blue Wall initiative to drive nature-based blue recovery efforts, enhance socio-ecological resilience, and foster a regenerative blue economy on the African continent and in support of African Island and Coastal States." (Moroni Declaration)*

The Africa-Europe High-Level Policy Dialogue on Ocean Governance and Blue Economy took place on 15 February 2024 at the Hyatt Regency in Addis Ababa, on the margins of the 44<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the African Union Executive Council. The meeting was an official side-event of the African Union Summit Week, being co-hosted by the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) and the Governments of Comoros, Seychelles, and Portugal, with the support of the African Union Commission and the European Union.

The dialogue was an opportunity to demonstrate that Africa and Europe can increase their joint work, given the potential of ocean cooperation and blue economy as a route to a stronger AU-EU Partnership. One of the main messages from the meeting was that ocean cooperation provides a blueprint for how the Africa-Europe Partnership can allow substantive work at the nexus of climate change and development.



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The meeting highlighted the wide-ranging nature of the ocean, contributing to climate regulation, food security, job creation, biodiversity, and global trade. The nature-based blue economy in Africa was described as a valuable opportunity for sustainable development, shared prosperity, and reinforced multilateralism.

Various African and European dignitaries attended the event, delivering statements on Africa's inspirational and unique leadership role in ocean and blue economy.

### Key takeaways

In his opening remarks, **Ambassador Conrad Medric, Ambassador of the Republic of Seychelles to the African Union**, stated that the event's theme, 'Leveraging Africa's Leadership on Ocean Governance and Blue Economy: Fostering a Strengthened Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership', resonated profoundly with his country. As a Small Developing Island State and the AU Champion for Blue Economy, "the country's very existence is intricately linked to the ocean", making its commitment to the Blue Economy "not a choice, but a way of life".

Notable recognition was directed to the Comoros-led June 2023 Moroni Declaration for Ocean and Climate Action in Africa. **Dhoiher Dhoulkamal, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Union of the Comoros**, emphasized the priority conferred by the Comoros to the ocean and blue economy, under its Chairmanship of the African Union propelled. He noted with importance that the Moroni process will move from a declaration to implementation, in the context of the 37th African Union Summit, positioning blue economy as a central theme in the next African Union (AU) Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYMP).

Likewise, the September 2023 Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change and Call to Action, which came out of the inaugural Africa Climate Summit (ACS), as well as the outcome of the Global Stocktake at COP28 in Dubai were acknowledged. Such leadership must be understood and matched by the international community to strengthen cooperation and realize Africa's real aspirations, as enshrined in the Africa Blue Economy Strategy (ABES).

This convening also illustrated how to best align ocean action and investments across and between Africa and Europe, embedded within the principles of sustainability, fairness, and equity, which should leverage the growing interest across Africa and Europe for novel investment solutions that advance a sustainable, regenerative, and inclusive blue economy.

**João Gomes Cravinho, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Portugal**, pointed to the clear mismatch between the lack of finance available and the large amount of sustainable ocean-related activities and projects. Leveraging his country's lessons learned from the II UN Ocean Conference held in Lisbon and the first two editions of the UN Sustainable Blue Economy Investment Forum, special focus was given to innovative financing solutions, such as the debt-for-climate swaps. Portugal is developing these mechanisms with Cape Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe, which facilitate blue and green investment in those countries, while alleviating the heavy debt burden.

Recalling the necessity to establish a mutually beneficial vision for Africa and Europe on ocean policy, **Chrissant Barbe**, who represented the **Department of the Blue Economy in the Republic of Seychelles**, reiterated his country's interest in promoting a stronger relationship between Africa and Europe within the realm of the Blue Economy, leveraging, for example, his country's successful experience with "blue bonds" that have financed dozens of projects on research, capacity-building, among other fields.

International cooperation on ocean protection has also progressed in recent months. Further joint efforts at multilateral level could offer the opportunity for both continents to work towards the full ratification and operationalisation of several treaties, including the High Seas Treaty, also known as the BBNJ, and the Global Plastics Treaty, in addition to issues related to harmful fisheries subsidies and deep-sea mining.

**Ambassador Nancy Karigithu, Co-chair of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance**<sup>1</sup>, outlined the preliminary outcomes from the work conducted so far by the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance. In terms of specific proposals, particular focus was placed on governance, capacity-sharing, as well as finance and investment. She stressed the need for sustainable fisheries management, taking advantage of indigenous knowledge as well as data and transparency to improve fish stock management, as well as the importance of working as partners on science, policy and data exchange through a cross-continental network of knowledge hubs for ocean action.

**African Union Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment, Ambassador Josefa Sacko**, called for a greater involvement of the private sector in supporting the much-needed solutions, including debt-for-climate swaps (as launched by Portugal, Cape Verde, and São Tomé e Príncipe). She endorsed the work of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance in advancing a common joint vision and roadmap, which should build on existing strategies, including the Africa Blue Economy Strategy, and future strategies such as the post-Malabo process.

It is high time to reinforce the Africa-Europe partnership as part of the broader commitment to multilateralism. Seeking alignment on International Treaties and other key international reforms would demonstrate Africa-Europe unity on the international stage and joint leadership in driving the ocean agenda for its sustainable management and protection.

**Ambassador Javier Niño Perez, Head of the European Union (EU) Delegation to the African Union**, praised the leadership of African partners on this topic, while acknowledging the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance as a catalyst for a stronger partnership. He took the floor to advocate for greater action on multilateral ocean-related issues, including biodiversity, climate and pollution, as well as to present concrete possibilities of cooperation, including under the EU's Global Gateway and with the financial support of the European Investment Bank.

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<sup>1</sup> An initiative under the steering authority of the European Commission Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) and in partnership with the African Union Commission. The initiative is facilitated by the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF).

There was, thus, clear convergence on the need to identify interests and common priorities to work on issues related to ocean governance and blue economy and, to that end, to establish a ‘Joint Vision and Roadmap’, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the AU Agenda 2063.

### Call to action

It is high time to elevate the ocean and blue economy as a fundamental component of climate resilience in Africa and Europe and as a pillar for strengthened Africa-Europe cooperation – and that requires both political and financial investment.

The shared ocean seascapes between Africa and Europe provide a clear rationale for a coordinated cross-continental strategy. It was underscored that rallying African and European champion countries together would contribute for a collective sustainable ocean and blue economy future.

It is, thus, time to establish an Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership, leveraging the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package, which would enhance cooperation on issues related to the blue economy. With the African Union becoming a permanent member of the G20, it is also timely for Africa to bring the issue to the leaders’ table and drive jointly, with the support of Europe, a global sustainable ocean agenda.

Collaboration on ocean and blue economy must be enhanced in the lead-up to upcoming events, namely the AU-EU Ministerial Meeting, COP29, the revision of National Determined Contributions, the 7th AU-EU Summit, and the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC 3).

### Event speakers

- **Dhoahir Dhoulkamal**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Union of the Comoros
- **João Gomes Cravinho**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Portugal
- **Ambassador Josefa Sacko**, African Union Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment
- **Ambassador Conrad Mederic**, Ambassador of the Republic of Seychelles to the African Union
- **Ambassador Javier Niño Perez**, Head of the European Union Delegation to the African Union
- **Ambassador Nancy Karigithu**, Co-chair of the Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, and Kenya's Special Envoy for Maritime and Blue Economy
- **Chrissant Barbe**, Director General, Blue Economy Department, Republic of Seychelles

**Moderator:** **Nassim Oulmane**, Director, Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resource Management Division at UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)