

High Seas Youth Ambassador Declaration for a new international legally binding treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Treaty)

As the global community races to tackle the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, the high seas offer a lifeline for planetary survival. The ocean covers 71 percent of the planet, with the high seas (otherwise known as areas beyond national jurisdiction or ABNJ) comprising 64 percent of the ocean and covering nearly half the surface of our planet. Research has shown that the high seas host immense amounts of biodiversity, are directly connected to coastal areas, and are an invaluable superhero in the fight against climate breakdown. Yet, the high seas are heading towards ecological destruction as a result of human activities both in the ocean and on-land, leading to the rapid degradation of ocean habitats and huge declines in marine biodiversity. Human activities, such as overfishing, oil and gas extraction, mining, and shipping, combined with the impacts of climate breakdown are unleashing catastrophic impacts on marine life, ecosystems, communities, cultures, and ways of life.

Youth are at the forefront of campaigns to reverse these destructive environmental trends by building movements, crafting innovation, advocating policies, and demonstrating effective leadership. However, so far, the ocean has been a rather distant concern for many governments, especially when it comes to the high seas, where destructive human activities that are ravaging marine life, and oceanscapes remain largely out of sight and out of mind.

As young people concerned for our futures, we demand urgent and swift action on behalf of world governments to ensure a healthy planet for present and future generations. And we have a transformative and once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do so for half of the planet through a new High Seas Treaty, otherwise known as the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty. We are calling on world governments to rapidly adopt an ambitious and binding global High Seas Treaty to ensure the protection and survival of marine biodiversity, to safeguard the livelihoods of coastal and Indigenous communities that depend on the ocean, and to help support a healthy ocean and its role as a major climate solution.

The threats to the high seas must be urgently addressed; we cannot delay or wait for additional and endless negotiating sessions. After over ten years of negotiations, the fourth Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), tentatively slated for 7-18 March 2022, needs to be the last. As [High Seas Youth Ambassadors](#) concerned for our futures that are intricately connected to the health of the ocean, we are calling for world governments to:



Key Asks for a new High Seas Treaty

General:

- Recognizing the imminent threats to planetary survival due to human-caused ecological destruction and climate breakdown, and to ensure a functioning and resilient ocean for future generations to come, States must work cooperatively to ensure that an ambitious High Seas Treaty that creates transformative change in how we manage, govern and protect high seas marine biodiversity is finalized at IGC4, with as many countries as possible ratifying the treaty as soon as possible.

Intersessional:

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, major environmental decisions have been delayed over the past two years, yet environmental destruction in our ocean has continued. To ensure IGC4 is the last, governments should engage at the highest political level in order to resolve as many outstanding textual issues as possible in advance of the final negotiating session.
- Countries and regional groups should work collaboratively in the run up to IGC4 to establish joint proposals for the treaty text to facilitate its finalisation.

Youth

- Youth have been conspicuously absent from the treaty negotiations to date, with little opportunity for input due to not easily accessible UN procedures and processes. As youth are the future and the ones that will inhabit our planet, States and the President of the Conference must work to create opportunities for youth voices from around the world to be heard and reflected in the treaty negotiations moving forward and once the treaty is adopted.
- Similar to the United Nations Convention and Framework on Climate Change and its recognition of youth as important stakeholders within its processes, the High Seas Treaty should recognize the legitimacy of a youth constituency as key stakeholders.

Area-based Management Tools, including Marine Protected Areas

- Due to the failures of existing high seas management organizations to adequately protect and safeguard high seas marine biodiversity from human activities, and based on the growing body of scientific literature highlighting the importance of marine protected areas in mitigating the climate and biodiversity crises, the treaty must enable the establishment and effective management of a network of representative and well-connected MPAs, including fully protected marine reserves.
- The creation of new protected areas in the high seas must be dictated by a process that is collaborative, consultative, time-bound and includes youth, Indigenous, and local community voices.



Environmental Impact Assessments

- Harmful activities that are conducted in coastal areas can have negative and consequential impacts in the high seas and harmful activities conducted in the high seas can have negative and consequential impacts within coastal areas. The same goes for interactions between ocean, atmosphere, and seabed. Due to this connected nature of the ocean to the rest of the planet, environmental impact assessments conducted under the High Seas Treaty must look at the *impacts of a proposed activity* and not just its location.
- Recognizing that the high seas are a global common, the global community must have a voice in activities that occur within the high seas. Therefore, the Conference of Parties (COP), as the international BBNJ body, must be given decision-making authority on whether a proposed activity may proceed depending on its impacts on the marine environment.

Marine Genetic Resources

- Considering that marine genetic resources found in areas beyond national jurisdiction are considered to be the “shared heritage of humankind” and to ensure that all can benefit from these genetic resources, a fair and equitable access and benefit-sharing regime is needed that mandates both monetary and non-monetary benefit-sharing.

Capacity Building and the Transfer of Marine Technology

- To ensure that all countries, particularly Least Developed States (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), can equitably access and benefit from marine biological diversity in ABNJ, an effective capacity building and transfer of marine technology mechanism needs to be established that includes sustainable funding.

Cross-cutting:

- We know the ocean is at the forefront of the effects of climate breakdown and if we do not protect the ocean, we will not solve the climate crisis. We must recognize the role the High Seas Treaty will have in preventing and mitigating the climate crisis by protecting marine biodiversity and limiting destructive ocean activities.
- The BBNJ Treaty should establish its own competence for marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction and should have the ability to establish marine protected areas, make decisions regarding human activities and address gaps and weaknesses in the existing high seas governance regime that has failed to adequately protect marine biodiversity.
- To prevent delaying tactics from stymying the protection and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in the face of the biggest crisis the world has ever faced, the High Seas Treaty must be able to make decisions that have the majority support of Parties and benefit all of humanity. Therefore, the treaty must establish a voting procedure when all good faith efforts to reach consensus have been exhausted.



Signed,

High Seas Youth Ambassadors



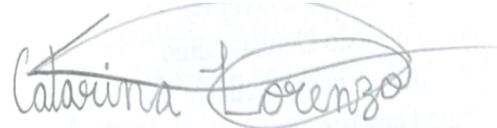
Jihyun Lee – South Korea



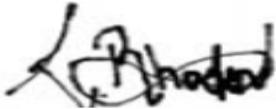
John Paul Jose - India



Lydia Rysavy - Sweden



Catarina Lorenzo - Brazil



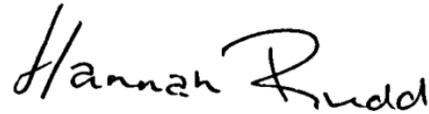
Leneka Rhoden - Jamaica



Britney Hay – Antigua and Barbuda



Ghaamid Abdulbasat - Tanzania



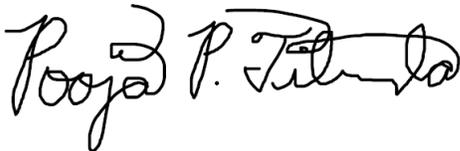
Hannah Rudd – United Kingdom



Fabio Arturo López Alfaro - México



Gayathra Bandara – Sri Lanka



Pooja Tivawala – United States



Olivia Livingstone - Liberia



Milla Heckler – United States

