Statement delivered by H.E. Mrs. Janine Coye-Felson, Permanent Representative of Belize to the United Nations, at the High-level Closing Event of the COP31 Virtual Ocean Pavilion, "Connecting the Ocean and Climate Agendas: Building Momentum for Ocean Action"

19 November 2026

Thank you, Moderator.

My thanks also to the organizers of the Virtual Ocean Pavilion for advancing the ocean as a shared concern across the climate, biodiversity and desertification agendas.

Excellencies, colleagues, friends,

In Belize, we see how closely these agendas are linked. Like other small island developing states, we are already acting on these connections through our nationally determined contributions and national adaptation planning.

Harnessing the synergies of the Rio Conventions gives us an opportunity to go further.

National teams can use shared evidence to guide climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation and land restoration. Restoring a degraded watershed, for example, can strengthen resilience on land while reducing the sediment that reaches coastal ecosystems. International cooperation can make it easier for countries to share that evidence, draw on relevant expertise and coordinate the support they receive.

In areas beyond national jurisdiction, the BBNJ Agreement gives us a way to put that same approach into practice.

It brings together integrated ocean management, precaution and an ecosystem approach as guiding principles and approaches in its implementation.

It places the best available science at the centre of decision-making alongside traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This is a significant shift for ocean governance. When knowledge holders participate on terms that respect their rights, they can broaden the discussion beyond immediate trade-offs to the responsibilities that follow from our relationship with the ocean.

The BBNJ goes even further. It places cooperation as a core obligation that runs throughout the Agreement. Equitable benefit-sharing can expand access to marine genetic research and create opportunities for scientists in developing countries to participate in knowledge generation and application for ocean governance. Cooperation on area-based management can help Parties develop connected networks of marine protected areas and coordinate measures with competent bodies. Cooperation on environmental impact assessment can improve the way activities are assessed and monitored. Strategic environmental assessments can help us see how pressures from different activities accumulate in an ocean already affected by warming and acidification. These are not examples of what could be. These are obligations; these are what should be with the implementation of the BBNJ.

The BBNJ COP1 in January is our opportunity to turn the momentum from Antalya into a programme of work.

The Preparatory Commission has recommended a draft decision that calls for regular engagement, early cooperation with bodies whose mandates most directly intersect with the Agreement's objectives, and flexibility in how they work together. It would ask the secretariat to seek membership in UN-Oceans, consult its counterparts and report back at COP2, with a joint work programme envisaged for COP3. It would also make cooperation a standing item on the COP agenda.

That brings me to the challenges. They are familiar: political will, financial resources and capacity. But we meet them at a distinct moment, while foundations are still being laid. At this stage, each challenge is also an opportunity to build cooperation in from the outset.

Take finance. The Agreement's financial mechanism includes a new special fund and the Global Environment Facility trust fund. The Global Environment Facility already serves the Rio Conventions, which offers a natural bridge between agendas. As the special fund is made operational, Parties have the opportunity to shape it so that support for implementation reinforces action under other frameworks.

Take capacity. A scientist trained once, or a dataset shared once, can serve several agreements. A synergistic approach to capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology is more efficient. For small delegations and administrations, it is also more equitable.

And take coordination itself. The Clearing-House Mechanism is mandated to facilitate international cooperation. Built well, it can serve as the nerve centre of cooperation, carrying information across agreements to where decisions are made.

Colleagues, the momentum for the ocean in Antalya is real. Through cooperation, the BBNJ Agreement can carry that momentum across agendas, from the climate and biodiversity conventions to areas beyond national jurisdiction, and back again.

When we meet in January, let us lay the foundations for cooperation that can do something tangible for the ocean. Let us make it possible for all Parties to contribute to the science, shape the measures and take part in putting them into effect.

I thank you.