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## FIRST SESSION OF THE HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE

### «THE BLUE BELT, A PLATFORM FOR ACTION FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE IN AFRICA»

Agadir – February 19<sup>th</sup> 2019

#### Agadir Declaration

##### **It is time to act**

The Blue Belt initiative takes place in the context of a long process that led to the awareness of the urgency to act. All parties insistently called out the issues the oceans are facing and its consequences on the populations. The list is long and cannot be exhaustive, but the alarming phenomena are well known to all: they range from the degradation of marine habitats to the acidification of the oceans or the rise in temperature, the erosion of biodiversity to pollution and the flooding of the oceans by plastic waste, not to mention the overexploitation of fish stocks.

The risks to marine ecosystems and fisheries resources are real; they are now visible from day to day and particularly worrying.

As many parties have pointed out, the situation is all the more alarming for Africa, because fishing is a particularly important source of protein, employment and economic activity for all coastal communities.

Fisheries and aquaculture are expected to experience severe disruption if strong, bold and disruptive mitigation and adaptation actions are not initiated immediately.

As recalled by Norway, it is all the more urgent that this is only twelve years away from the 2030 deadline, when all States of the United Nations committed themselves to the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In the opinion of all, the need to act with concrete actions and not words presume adequate mechanisms; as such the Blue Belt initiative stands out for its operational, concrete and pragmatic vision, with an orientation towards networking for ecological investment in sustainable and environmentally friendly projects in the private sector.

##### **There are many challenges, but so are the opportunities**

The Blue Belt initiative was launched in the wake of the COP 22 in Marrakech. Upon the conviction that transforming fisheries and aquaculture activities into more sustainable practices and reducing anthropogenic pressure on the oceans was not only possible but also necessary, the initiative was a major response in favor of the sustainability of the oceans, the blue economy, and the fight against climate change.



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Many parties have joined and see it as a comprehensive response to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Priorities and challenges for sustainable fisheries growth are expressed in a cross-disciplinary way, addressing the need to strengthen the partnership in all its forms (cross-sector, multi-stakeholder, South-South and North-South and trilaterally).

#### **Many efforts, but still a lot to do in terms of fisheries sustainability**

The parties have shown a great deal of effort in assessing fish stocks in Africa in recent years, either at the national level or with the support of the Regional Organizations in Fisheries Management, as well as within the framework of joint scientific cruises with the help of third countries and organizations (FAO, Norway, Spain, etc.). While these efforts have helped improve knowledge and management measures of some stocks, there is still a need to continue these efforts to address fisheries management in an ecosystem-based framework, with a better consideration of oceans conservation issues and the effects of climate change.

A call for the harmonization of fisheries policies for shared stocks has been launched and requires a strengthening of the framework for regional cooperation in fisheries and aquaculture.

#### **IUU fishing, a scourge to be eradicated in priority**

All efforts to regulate and sustainably manage fisheries cannot succeed without concerted action in the fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU fishing). While many parties called for support and assistance in their respective efforts to combat IUU fishing, FAO reiterated the importance of signing the Agreement on Port State Measures, the only global policy instrument in the fight against IUU fishing, which entered into force in 2016 and has a significant support program for its operational implementation in more than fifty countries.

#### **Marine Protected Areas, a priority for Africa**

Marine spatial planning is a stated priority by several parties and has led to the implementation of Marine Protected Areas in many African countries among other measures. The parties shared their willingness to increase cooperation and exchange of experience in this field. The Blue Belt offers a suitable mechanism for this.

#### **Ocean observation and research: the pillars of sustainability and innovation**

The oceanographic, environmental and health observation and monitoring mechanisms for the oceans deployed in Africa are well below what is needed in the context of climate change and the current human-induced pressure on the planet, despite efforts made at both national and transnational levels.

More generally, several areas such as oceanographic research, innovation, health monitoring, aquaculture, processing of fishery products, reduction of post-harvest losses, good practices, etc., need to be developed in Africa as a matter of urgency, considering their importance for the emergence of the blue economy. This is a major challenge that needs to be addressed with greater enthusiasm and cooperation between all concerned countries and partners, in order to bring fisheries systems up to the standards of a successful blue economy, in line with the requirements of ecological and socio-economic resilience.



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Fisheries development based on innovative blue solutions would bring promising opportunity to transform current constraints and those that will increasingly be imposed by climate change into the possibility to create greater inclusive prosperity, without depreciating the value of resources and natural habitats.

### **Aquaculture, a possible alternative**

The increase in global fish production largely comes from aquaculture. African countries, whose production level is very low, see this field of activity as a possible very high growth potential alternative to fishing at both continental and marine levels. The political will to develop aquaculture in response to the growing demand for animal protein by their population and the stagnation of fish production by catch fishing is clearly demonstrated by a majority of Parties. Aquaculture development programs have emerged in several countries. Their goal is to ensure food security and contribute to the restoration of populations and natural habitats.

Conscious of the many challenges to be overcome for the sustainable development of aquaculture in Africa, countries called for close collaboration on research, innovation and exchange of expertise as part of the cooperation mechanisms of the Blue Belt initiative.

### **Financing, one of the keys to success**

The importance of providing the financing mechanisms as an essential pillar to support the emergence of the blue economy has been stressed repeatedly. Several proposals for innovative mechanisms have emerged, such as one based on the principle of taking some of the wealth created by the exploitation of the oceans to finance innovative and sustainable projects, or another based on the polluter pays principle, but also currently undergoing funding mechanisms such as partnerships with donors and international development support institutions.

### **The Blue Belt, a platform for the blue economy cooperation**

Efforts and actions underway to include sustainable development and the fight against climate change effects into fisheries economic and social policies in Africa are certainly visible, but the implementation of mechanisms for cooperation and mobilization of technical and financial support to enable countries to achieve collectively and effectively their transition to a blue fishery economy remains the major challenge.

The adhesion to the Blue Belt initiative that proposes the implementation of a collaborative platform is considered as a privileged response to this issue and can be a driving force for South-South, North-South and tripartite cooperation. As such, ATLAFCO and RAFISMER, which are particularly active in the field of fisheries cooperation, are channels that should be favored and strengthened and on which the Blue Belt could rely.

The operationalization of the Blue Belt collaborative platform could be a real opportunity to facilitate and catalyze innovative mechanisms, projects and solutions in the sector of fisheries, fishing and processing technologies, biotechnology and operational oceanography.

By supporting fields of collaboration between decision-makers, researchers, fishing communities and economic operators, the platform could contribute to:

- Make converge local initiatives;
- Create a critical mass of resources and skills to deal with shared issues;



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- Structure R&D clusters and ecosystems in the South;
  - Provide more visibility to donors;
  - Facilitate transfer and sharing of experience.

Ultimately, this would lead to the emergence of a «community partners» around the Blue Belt.