

The Declaration from the Conference of the Ocean People, 2022

Reclaiming the Ocean; Reimagining our future

[The International Conference of the Ocean People (C-OP 2022) took place on 26th, 28th and 30th June 2022. This global declaration, presented and adopted at its valedictory session held on the 30th June 2022 C-OP, brought forward the diverse historical claims and testimonies uniting the ocean people for the first time on a global platform asserting their historical traditional customary rights over the ocean. It showcased the diversity within the ocean people as we participated and shared our views from different parts of the world like South America, Caribbean Islands, African and the Asia Pacific. We witnessed tremendous mobilisation from South Asia, where hundreds of people from the coastal states in India and Sri Lanka joined the C-OP 2022, via community screenings at the ground, boosting C-OP's mass participation. Joining our people in this pioneering event were academicians, civil society groups, experts and members of international media.]

We, the ocean people of the world, having come together at the C-OP 2022, assert that the oceans and resources, including the seas, shorelands, forests, estuaries, mangrove wetlands, and inland water bodies, are an integral part of our lives. We, the collectives of ocean, coastal and inland communities around the world, stand united in asserting that our oceanic civilization is our 'way of life' and that we are the historical custodians of the ocean ecology. Through this declaration, we affirm that "We are indivisible from the Ocean: and the Ocean is indivisible from us". We reiterate that there cannot be the ocean without the ocean people and vice versa.

Our reclamation of the oceanic resources has special significance in the context of the lopsided 'Ocean Conference' organised by the United Nations (UN). The ocean is being constantly treated as the economic frontier for 'sustainable' investments, especially after the international economic downturn, following the COVID-19 pandemic. Ocean ecology, which includes our homelands, is erroneously valued at several trillion dollars and is being illegally rented to multiple 'stakeholders' in the name of 'Exploration, Expansion and Exploitation'. This is thrust upon people as part of the essential post-COVID National Economic Recovery, through Blue Economy projects. In this light, the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-2022), its agenda, programming, and the list of participating actors, reveal that it will enhance ocean grabbing and legitimise 'blue washing', entrenching the influence of the corporate actors (productive and finance capital) as well as philanthropic donors and big international environmental organisations in ocean economy decision making. We reject the commodification of the oceans and commercialisation of the lives of the ocean people.

At this historic C-OP 22, we, the ocean people voiced our objection to how our ocean resources are being leased out for the Blue Economy projects, through Marine Spatial Planning, financed

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by pro-blue international institutions. Our waters (Marine and Inland) are being packed with Seafood (Blue) Trade agreements, promoting intensive fisheries production technologies. Through the commitments of 30X30 biodiversity targets, 30% of our coastland is being slated out for 'conservation' purposes, bringing it under marine protected or conservation areas. The remaining coastal lands are taken for coastal economic zones, as beaches for tourism, sites for energy extraction, petro-chemical hubs, ports, and so on. Inland water bodies have also been occupied for industrial aquaculture activities. Thus, all our waters, coastal lands, forests, mangroves are all being usurped, now more so under the garb of post-COVID economic recovery.

The introduction of 'climate resilient infrastructures' for 'sustainable ocean economies', alienating the stakes of the ocean people on the ocean and its resources is nothing but 'climate colonisation'. In this context, where are we, the ocean people, expected to go? This is our homeland. Where are our rights? This is a process of Blue Apartheid, of constantly dispossessing our people of customary rights, perpetrated through 'blue fencing'.

In response to the ongoing United Nations Oceans Conference, the Conference of the Ocean People, thus, would like to affirm and declare the following 5 R's as our core principles. to the effective inclusion of ocean people in our assertion of historical, traditional, and customary rights to the ocean and its resources, in order to protect the ocean and ourselves as the custodians of the Ocean:

We **Reject** the corporate-led false climate solutions and mega Blue Economy proposals of the UN, its member nations and corporations, who are neither stakeholders of the oceans nor should be the primary decision-makers. We remind the world that the earth has been brought to its current disastrous state of affairs by these very companies and their capitalist, colonial greed;

We demand **Recognition** of the Ocean People by nation states and international organisations. We are here to assert ourselves and affirm our presence, and articulate our historical and traditional customary rights over the oceans. We also re-assert our rights to capture fisheries;

We demand **Restitution**, whereby the Ocean People, unitedly, reclaim the customary governance of the ocean, demanding the redistribution of oceanic resources. We demand restitution of ocean governance to ocean communities;

Resisting the blue paradigms, we call upon governments to review and change international governance regarding the oceans, which are 'Draining the Ocean and Drowning the Ocean People'. We demand an immediate moratorium on all Blue Economy policies and projects that erase our identities, lead to the extermination of ocean people, and thus contribute to blue imperialism; and

We demand **Re-imagination** of our future within the ocean, whereby the ocean and its resources are responsibly not only brought back to us, but conserved for our future generations.

We declare this as urgent, necessary and possible!

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