STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE COUNTRIES LISTED BELOW TO BE DELIVERED DURING THE 32nd Session of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) Assembly under item 3.1 "IOC Matters & Reports. Chair's statement" - June 21, 2023, Paris

I am giving this statement on behalf of Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cook Islands, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, Norway, Palau, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Ukraine, and my own country, New Zealand.

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) is an invaluable UNESCO institution which has empowered Member States to better protect and manage the world`s ocean, seas and other marine and maritime resources. Through its emphasis on international cooperation and sustainable development it has also contributed to the pillars of a more peaceful and just world.

Unfortunately, the IOC`s work and the values it represents have been severely undermined by Russia`s illegal, unprovoked and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine. This can be seen not only through the devastation incurred by Ukraine`s seas and coastline, but by the obstruction of critical scientific work, which has become all the more relevant in the context of the current situation.

Since 24 February 2022, there has been a near total interruption of vital scientific work by Ukrainian scientists along its coastlines, including the collection of high-quality data in support of the IOC`s Black Sea Global Ocean Observing System. This observation system is critical for the management of the flora of littoral countries and enables a better understanding of the Black Sea ecosystem.

Moreover, the impediment of the IOC`s work conceals important information regarding what is generally known to be severe and long lasting damage to the Black Sea caused by Russia`s war. Some of this damage was made apparent for the world to see following the catastrophic consequences of the destruction of the Hydroelectric Dam at Kakhovka. Ukrainian authorities estimate that at least 150 tons of oil slick, hundreds of tons of chemicals, fertilizers, and countless mines and other unexploded munitions have been carried into the Black Sea basin. This toxic sludge and war debris will pose a danger to civilians and wildlife alike and likely contaminate the Sea`s delicate flora and habitat for decades to come.

The Black Sea and the Sea of Azov are being threatened in other ways as well, as Russia has transformed these areas into active war zones. Destroyed and abandoned vehicles pollute water with leaking fuel and lubricants, contaminating natural habitats.

The full effects on the marine habitats of the Gulf of Odesa, Danube Delta, and Azov Sea, are yet to be estimated, although there is reason for concern as these contain among the most fragile biodiversity in Ukraine and have not been spared the consequences of Russia`s war.

Let us be clear. The devastation described is the direct consequence of Russia`s decision to illegally invade Ukraine. These actions impede the work of the IOC and violate international law, including Article 2(4) of the UN Charter.

There is an urgent need for transparency regarding the situation impacting Ukraine`s coastlines and Seas in order to assess damage and limit the long term impact on regional ecosystems. Ukrainian scientists must have unhindered and safe access to conduct their work, as called for within the framework of the IOC and other international organizations.

In this context, we again call for Russia to immediately end its war of aggression, and to recommit itself to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and the shared ideals of the UNESCO Constitution.