6 June, 2023

His Excellency António Guterres
Secretary-General United Nations
New York, USA
Sent by email: Antonio.Guterres@un.org

RE: Calling for a moratorium on deep-sea mining, as a necessary measure to help end the ocean emergency

Excellency, Dear Secretary-General,

We write to you on behalf of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, a global alliance of over one hundred non-governmental organizations, to ask that you intervene in the critical debate on the possible launch of one of the largest extractive operations in ocean history: deep-sea mining.

According to the UN's World Ocean Assessment, the common heritage of humankind - the deep sea – constitutes the largest source of species and ecosystem diversity on Earth. It supports the multiple ecosystem processes necessary for Earth's natural systems to function, including the absorption and storage of vast quantities of the carbon dioxide emitted into the air by human activities. Scientists believe that as many as 10 million species may inhabit the deep sea, the majority of which are yet to be discovered.

You have spoken of the planetary “triple crisis”. Launching this new industry would exacerbate both the crises of biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste. As noted in your opening remarks to the COP15 Biodiversity Conference, “ecosystems have become playthings of profit”, and that “human activities are laying waste to once-thriving forests, jungles, farmland, oceans, rivers, seas and lakes”.

Scientists warn that the environmental impacts of deep-sea mining, including loss of biodiversity, would be large-scale, severe and irreversible on human timescales. These include the extinction of deep-sea species, destruction of ecosystems and habitats; underwater sediment storms and wastewater disposal; and non-stop noise and light pollution. These effects would result in cumulative impacts on already stressed and fragile open ocean and deep-sea ecosystems and on the millions of people who depend on a healthy, thriving ocean for their food and livelihoods. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that a just transition to a post-fossil fuel economy, to combat the third crisis – the climate emergency - can be realized without mining the deep sea.
Excellency, in your remarks at the January 2023 Ocean Race Summit you said, “humanity has been waging a senseless and self-defeating war on nature. The ocean is on the front lines of the battle.” The threat of deep-sea mining is imminent: it could be greenlighted by the International Seabed Authority within the next few months.

Still, there remains a window of opportunity for governments to stop this crisis before it begins. The momentum against deep-sea mining is forceful and growing. In 2021, the IUCN adopted a resolution for a moratorium on deep-sea mining. Alongside opposition to deep-sea mining from scientists, the private sector, civil society and the fishing industry, a number of States are calling for a moratorium or precautionary pause on this new extractive industry, on the basis of concerns regarding environmental protection, scientific uncertainty, lack of social license and deep-rooted governance issues.

These calls must now turn into action to establish a precautionary moratorium on deep-sea mining before it is too late, in recognition of the need for transformative change in humankind's relationship with our planet. Representatives of the deep-sea mining industry recently declared that “resistance is futile”. Our response is encapsulated in your words: “Let’s end the ocean emergency and preserve this precious blue gift for our children and grandchildren”.

Excellency, in the spirit of international commitments to protect our ocean, on World Ocean Day 2023 we urge you to add your voice to the calls for a moratorium on deep-sea mining, toward ensuring a healthy ocean for future generations.

Sincerely,

Sian Owen
Director
Deep Sea Conservation Coalition

On behalf of our membership and partners,
The Stichting Deep Sea Conservation Coalition is registered with the Netherlands trade register under number 59473460.
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