Papua New Guinea Statement by Mr. Fred Sarufa, Deputy Permanent Representative, to the High-Level Commemorative Meeting of the 76th General Assembly session to mark the 40th Anniversary of the Adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), New York, 29 April 2022 (Check against delivery)

Mr. President,

As an archipelagic State, Papua New Guinea welcomes today’s commemorative occasion of the Fortieth Anniversary of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and acknowledges the initiative of the co-sponsors (Denmark, Grenada, Kenya, Portugal and Singapore) of this event and thank the President of the General Assembly for hosting it and also grateful for the distinguished key speakers insights shared today.

We pay special tribute for the foresight, wisdom and boldness of the international community, through this august body, for the establishment of the modern legal framework for ocean governance, in the form of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

A monumental and historic achievement, and in the 40 years since, UNCLOS has proven to be one of the most successful international agreements ever created to govern the global commons. Imagine, for a moment, where would the international community be, today, without UNCLOS?

As a Party to UNCLOS, Papua New Guinea is committed to upholding and defending UNCLOS as the “constitution” for the ocean and the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out.

Mr. President, in Papua New Guinea’s view, one of the great strengths of UNCLOS is that it provides legal certainty and predictability in protecting the jurisdiction, sovereignty, and sovereign rights of all States and this is especially crucially important for small developing maritime States like mine.

Another fundamental strength of UNCLOS is that it is not a static instrument. UNCLOS establishes not only international rules and norms but also principles and has an in-built flexibility to respond to evolving circumstances.
Today, these evolving circumstances include the threats of sea-level rise and climate change and the challenge of sustainable development.

In this regard, my delegation joins our Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) members and calls attention to our regional landmark Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the Face of Climate Change-related Sea-Level Rise adopted by our leaders (PIF) in August 2021.

This Declaration is a formal statement by PIF leaders that our maritime zones, once established in accordance with UNCLOS, and rights and entitlements flowing from them, are maintained and continue to apply without reduction notwithstanding any physical changes connected to climate change related sea-level rise, and that this is supported by UNCLOS and the principles underlying UNCLOS.

**Mr. President**, we also recognise the dynamism of UNCLOS in the context of its valued contributions to the attainment of the SDGs on the future we want, as reflected in SDG14 and also championed through the UN Ocean Conferences.

In a similar vein, the application of UNCLOS for the further protection of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) under an international legally binding instrument under UNCLOS, whose intergovernmental process we are strongly committed to and my delegation looks forward to an ambitious and successful conclusion in August this year.

In conclusion, **Mr. President**, Papua New Guinea reiterates its steadfast commitment to the primacy of UNCLOS as the enduring legal order for the oceans and the seas and also to continue to work in cooperation with the international community to further advance the mandate of UNCLOS for the benefit of humankind and the ecosystem.

Finally, we align our statement with those made by the respective Chairs of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) – Fiji; the Pacific SIDS (Samoa); and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) – Antigua and Barbuda.

I thank you!