

**Twelfth Conference of the Parties to the Nairobi Convention (NC
COP12)**

***Side Event: Ocean and Climate nexus: Building a shared African Civil Society
priorities in the SWIO region***

OPENING SPEECH: DR. MITHIKA MWENDA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PACJA

Good afternoon, Ladies and gentlemen,

I take this opportunity to welcome you in this side event entitled: ***Ocean and Climate nexus: Building a shared African Civil Society priorities in the SWIO region*** -which is cohosted by Pan African Climate Justice Alliance(PACJA) WWF and SWIOTUNA.

Ladies and gentlemen, our oceans remain vital ecosystems serving as critical life support systems for humans being and other elements of biodiversity. They cover 71% of Earth's surface and contains 97% of its water but most importantly they absorb 90% of the excess heat generated by greenhouse gas emissions and also absorb 25% of carbon dioxide emissions. Thus, our oceans are much more than a vast bodies of water; they help to regulate Earth's temperature by absorbing and moving heat around the globe and absorbing greenhouse gases. In many ways, the ocean acts like a climate guardian, helping to slow the pace of warming. These facts put our oceans right at the center of our climate change systems.

When we think about climate change, we often picture melting glaciers, drought, floods, hotter summers, or storms sweeping across the land. But there is another force shaping our climate every day; one that covers more than two-thirds of our planet; the ocean.

As the planet warms, the ocean absorbs more heat. Marine heat waves become more frequent, coral reefs suffer, and many sea creatures are forced to move to cooler waters. Warmer water also expands, contributing to rising sea levels. At the same time, the ocean absorbs carbon dioxide, becoming more acidic. This makes it harder for corals and shell-forming animals to build and maintain their homes. Most importunately over 680 million coastal communities are facing imminent danger from the rising sea level and the fishing industry, which they mostly rely on is significantly thwarted by the changing PH of the sea waters. Bottomline, when healthy marine ecosystems are damaged, we lose the protection and natural wealth they provide.

The good news is that the ocean is not only affected by climate change; It is also part of the solution. Protecting mangroves, seagrass meadows, and salt marshes can help store carbon and shelter coastlines. Creating and enforcing marine protected areas can give ecosystems room to recover. And reducing greenhouse gas emissions can ease the pressure we are placing on the ocean.

Ladies and gentlemen, despite immense and growing evidence on the significant role of our oceans in mitigation and adaptation, we are yet to see commensurate attention given to the ocean climate nexus in the climate change negotiation processes. Infact, the dialogues on ocean climate nexus started gathering pace at COP25 in 2019.

To begin with we need to enhance the potential of our oceans in the just transition discourse by tapping the renewable ocean energies' potential which they present including; offshore wind, wave, and tidal technologies, as well as green shipping technologies -which have the potential to deliver long-term carbon emissions reductions, with low environmental impacts. This potential can be unlocked only if we avail finance and capacity building, which are critical enablers to accelerate technology related ocean climate action. Developing countries, especially LDCs and SIDS, lack access to finance and have significant capacity building needs for the uptake of these technologies.

In a more practical sense, countries should consider enhancement of blue carbon ecosystems in their NDCs and NAPs, to achieve their emissions reduction targets, notwithstanding the existing methodological challenges. Countries should consider having quantified targets for their ocean-based measures and include the needs for, or the provision of, ocean-related finance, technologies and capacity building for implementation of their ocean targets.

I call upon all of us to engage deeply in this conversation as brainstorm on startegies of elevating the ocean climate nexus in global climate negotiation platforms.

I thank you!