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At the 81st United Nations General Assembly, Belgium is actively campaigning to host the BBNJ secretariat in Brussels

During the High-Level Week of the 81st United Nations General Assembly in New York, Belgium is prioritizing the protection of the ocean. The Minister for Justice and the North Sea, Annelies Verlinden, is particularly emphasizing Belgium's commitment. She is actively campaigning in New York for Brussels to host the secretariat of the new BBNJ Agreement on the protection of biodiversity in the high seas.

Belgium is taking advantage of the presence of heads of state, ministers and international organisations in New York to rally support for its bid. Through various events, our country is drawing attention to the importance of a healthy ocean and the swift implementation of the BBNJ Agreement.

Belgium took part in the high-level meeting entitled 'Addressing the existential threats posed by sea-level rise'. This event aims to mobilise the international community in the face of increasingly rapid sea-level rise, which threatens nearly a billion people by 2050, mainly in vulnerable coastal areas and island states, and which has major consequences, particularly in terms of security, development and the economy.

Furthermore, Belgium organised, in collaboration with Cabo Verde, the reception entitled 'Successes on the High Seas'. Diplomats, international organisations, scientists and representatives of civil society came together to draw attention to crucial ocean-related issues, such as the consequences of rising sea levels, the preservation of biodiversity and the defence of international law of the sea. This initiative forms part of Belgium's commitment to the BBNJ agreement.

Finally, the symbolic 'Run for the Ocean' event was also part of the Belgian campaign. Through this initiative, Belgium is giving further visibility to ocean protection and to Brussels' bid to host the future BBNJ secretariat.

Belgium has major strengths that make it well-suited to host the BBNJ secretariat. Our country ratified the agreement in 2025 and has for years been among the pioneers in international ocean diplomacy, marine science and sustainable ocean management. Thanks to its central location, its extensive diplomatic network, the presence of international institutions and its scientific expertise, Brussels offers an excellent base for the secretariat.

The High-Level Week presents a unique opportunity to convince international partners of the added value that Brussels offers as the seat of a secretariat set to play a key role in the protection of biodiversity in the high seas and the sustainable management of the ocean.

The Minister for Justice and the North Sea, Annelies Verlinden, said: " Belgium is ready to make Brussels the diplomatic heart of the ocean. A place where science and politics come together, and where all nations can make their voices heard in the protection of our blue planet."

What is the BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) agreement?

The BBNJ agreement is an international agreement concluded under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which aims to ensure the protection and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, such as the high seas and the deep seabed. These areas cover nearly two-thirds of the ocean and fall outside the authority of individual states. The treaty sets out rules concerning, in particular, the conservation of ecosystems, the protection of marine protected areas, the sharing of marine genetic resources, environmental impact assessments and capacity-building for developing countries. The aim is to strengthen cooperation between countries and to provide a legal framework that protects the ocean.

The BBNJ agreement will officially enter into force on 17 January 2027.

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