

OCEAN CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 8 JUNE 2017

On Thursday morning, plenary celebrated World Oceans Day. In the afternoon, plenary continued the general debate. A partnership dialogue was devoted to increasing scientific knowledge, and developing research capacity and transfer of marine technology.

PLENARY

WORLD OCEANS DAY: Noting that the ocean makes Earth unique in the solar system, Co-President Isabelle Lövin said World Oceans Day celebrates our dream of a healthy and productive ocean. UN General Assembly President Peter Thomson said World Oceans Day also celebrates our awareness of the need to “right the wrongs” we have done to the ocean. Noting more than 1,000 voluntary commitments submitted, he said the conference is a turning point towards protecting the ocean for posterity. Miguel de Serpa Soares, UN Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, on behalf of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, said that the 2030 Agenda provides a common vision and the conference has galvanized determination to keep the ocean safe and bountiful.

Via video link, UNESCO youth representatives urged decision makers to act now to ensure that “our children will remember us as the generation that avoided the catastrophe, rather than the one that created it.” Lamenting the devastating effect of human activity on the ocean, Fabien Cousteau, documentary filmmaker, called on delegates to leverage innovation and think outside the box to save the ocean, and ensure its future for the children of tomorrow. Describing the status of the oceans in which 90% of large fish species have disappeared due to overexploitation, 50% of corals have died where there is ever increasing acidification, Brian Skerry, Avatar Alliance Foundation, drew attention to a new generation of scientists, ocean researchers, filmmakers, activists and conservationists working to protect the ocean, and stressed that the Call for Action “starts here and it starts now.”

Underlining that humans are the crew on “Spaceship Earth,” Cady Coleman, retired astronaut, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), noted that knowledge collected from space provides opportunities to monitor life on Earth. Stressing that the “ocean is everybody’s business,” Sir Richard Branson, Founder of Virgin Group, urged going further than SDG 14 targets on MPAs

and noted that a new treaty on BBNJ, with teeth and vision, could be the “Paris Agreement for the ocean.” Sylvia Earle, Mission Blue, stressed that nations with coastlines take unprecedented action, particularly those SIDS that dedicate 80% of their EEZ to MPAs.

Aulani Wilhelm, Polynesian Voyaging Society, urged the conference to “address the plight of our oceans” and take bold action to care for “island Earth.” Scott Bolton, Southwest Research Institute, underlined the irony of looking for water as indicator for life on other planets while failing to protect oceans on Earth. Iain Kerr, Ocean Alliance, pointed to the “game-changing potential” of low-cost, field-friendly and scalable technologies such as drones in advancing understanding of the oceans. Artist and photographer Chris Jordan introduced a video showing the effects of plastics on seabirds on Midway, the island that is furthest away from any continent. Photographer and conservationist Ellen Cuylaerts announced the winners of the 2017 World Oceans Day oceanic photo competition.

Terry Tamminen, CEO, Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, announced teaming up with Mexico to try to save the vaquita, the world’s most endangered mammal, through a permanent ban on gill-nets in the region, enhanced enforcement of illegal fishing legislation, and an *ex situ* repopulation programme. In a video message, UN messenger of peace Leonardo DiCaprio, argued that “if given a chance, nature can rebound,” calling for the conclusion of a “Paris Agreement for the ocean” with ambitious, measurable goals to protect it from unlimited exploitation, to the benefit of all.

Highlighting that 80 million tons of plastic are dumped into the ocean every year, actor Diego Luna referred to the generosity of the ocean in providing oxygen, inspiration and tranquility, and urged finding inspiration from local community voices. Fatou Janha Mboob, TRY Oyster Women Association, the Gambia, described how her organization empowered oyster-harvesting women to improve their livelihoods and restore mangrove ecosystems, noting that when people at the grassroots level are empowered “everything will be possible.” Providing a personal account of ecosystem decline on his home island, Budi Setiawan, Kelompok Peduli Lingkungan Belitung Coastal Community Group, Indonesia, presented work to restore natural resources through a network of local businesses, and education and awareness raising among youth. Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman, Nippon Foundation, announced

that the Foundation, working with the UN Division for Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea (UNDOALOS), will launch three new capacity-building projects aimed at enhancing SIDS' ocean governance capabilities and training oceans experts to drive SDG 14 implementation.

Announcing the “Run for the Oceans” global event to be held on 8 June 2017, Eric Liedtke, Executive Board Member, Adidas, announced that the company would make one million pairs of ocean plastic shoes, equivalent to 11 million plastic bottles in 2017, and five million pairs in 2018; and called for private-sector leadership, as well as other partnerships, to completely eliminate virgin polyester from the supply chain and replace it with ocean plastic.

Karan Jerath, young leader for the SDGs, showcased his invention of a device separating oil, water and gas as homogeneous mixtures at the source to clean up oil spills. He stressed that youth, as the next generation of problem solvers, have the power to start a movement to make the world a better place. Melati and Isabel Wijsen, co-founders, Bye Bye Plastic Bags Bali, reported on mobilizing over 12,000 people collecting 40 tonnes of garbage along the coastline in one day, resulting in a Bali government commitment to ban plastic bags by 2018. They affirmed that “youth are only 17% of the global population but 100% of the future.”

Co-President Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama closed the celebration by calling on all men, women and children to make the fight against further ocean degradation personal. After a musical performance by the Dawul Wuru Aboriginal Corporation from the Great Barrier Reef, Australia, a group of Youth from coastal UNESCO World Heritage Sites highlighted that the conference participants had “the power to shape the world that youth will inherit,” and called for taking part in the “#MyOceanPledge” promoted by UNESCO.

GENERAL DEBATE: President Nana Akufo-Addo, Ghana, announced his country's plan to eliminate marine plastics from its coast by 2025. SINGAPORE highlighted the upcoming launch of a course on sustainable oceans, as well as a voluntary national review of SDG implementation in 2018. INDIA unveiled a new India-UN development fund to support early warning capacities in Pacific SIDS. AUSTRALIA drew attention to its commitment of US\$1 billion to support Pacific SIDS to integrate climate action into development plans. VANUATU pointed to a plan to implement comprehensive MSP by 2020.

GERMANY stressed its International Climate Initiative financing marine biodiversity projects and the creation of Blue Action Fund. SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES highlighted their commitment to protect 20% of its waters by 2020 as part of the Caribbean Challenge Initiative, and ban on import and use of Styrofoam containers; and supported appointment of a Secretary General's special representative on ocean. URUGUAY emphasized cooperation and education efforts. The PHILIPPINES highlighted commitment to combat climate change effects and strengthen MPAs, and its clean-up initiative. CANADA announced creation of a new MPA of 4,000 square kilometers, and the goal to reach 10% MPA coverage by 2020.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA reported on establishing a marine economic system protection trust to ensure that MPAs are properly managed. TOGO drew attention to the adoption of the 2016 African Charter on Maritime Security, Safety and Development (Lomé Charter). BRAZIL called attention to the Brazilian Blue Fund to, *inter alia*, ensure that 10% of its waters are under area-based management by 2020, and highlighted a joint proposal to establish the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary. TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO called for an intergovernmental conference (IGC) on an ILBI on BBNJ to be convened before the end of 2018. TUNISIA called for financial assistance and technology transfer to ensure African countries can fully implement SDG 14.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION called for strengthening regional seas conventions; highlighted legislation banning drift-net fishing within its EEZ; and said SDG 14 must be retained within HLPF purview. PALESTINE highlighted technology transfer obligations under UNCLOS. MYANMAR noted established processes under UNCLOS should assess SDG 14 implementation. GREECE committed to expand MPA coverage from 6 to 17% by 2020 and drew attention to cooperation with Cyprus and Egypt on SDG 14 implementation. GRENADA highlighted establishing the world's first underwater sculpture and coral rehabilitation parks.

ALGERIA drew attention to the recently agreed Malta MedFish4Ever Declaration, and noted his country's commitments on ocean education and marine pollution. UN-Oceans underlined the need for strengthened terms of reference and sustainable funding to UN-Oceans to ensure enhanced assistance to states in their SDG implementation.

IUCN noted priority areas to accelerate action, including lowering GHG emissions, extending MPA networks, transitioning to sustainable fisheries, tackling marine pollution, and convening an IGC on an ILBI on BBNJ. ISA noted voluntary commitments on increasing socio-economic benefits to SIDS, improving governance of Africa's deep seabed, and enhancing women's participation in marine science. INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY AND ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE called for applying the principles of active citizenship and democratic control of marine resources in the implementation of SDG 14. FRENCH POLYNESIA pledged to classify its entire EEZ as an MPA called “the Great Far Ocean” MPA. UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN underscored the role of academic institutions in remedying negative trends in the marine environment.

PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUE 6: SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, RESEARCH CAPACITY, TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

Co-Chair Thorgerður Katrín Gunnarsdóttir, Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture, Iceland, highlighted the need for: well-funded, independent research, and better use and transfer of existing technologies; and science to defend long-term societal interests. Co-Chair Héctor Soldi, Vice Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Peru, highlighted the need for policymakers to listen to science even if it makes them uncomfortable.

Johan Kuylensstierna, Executive Director, Stockholm Environment Institute, invited a discussion on how capacity building and technology transfer actually meet developing

countries' needs, rather than externally identified priorities.

Patricia Andrea Miloslavich de Klein, Simón Bolívar University, underscored: building capacity for data analysis and modelling; and prioritizing cost-effective technologies for the collection of essential ocean variables. Mark Abbott, Director, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, underlined: fast, low-cost technological innovation by small, locally-dispersed teams; and the need to understand marine ecosystems and species' responses to climate change. Amos Barkai, co-owner and CEO of OLSPS Analytics, South Africa, cautioned against data over-collection and a "culture of misreporting" in the fisheries sector, noting challenges in processing and managing data, and calling for big-data thinking. Vladimir Ryabinin, UNESCO-IOC, called for unified data collection protocols, and reported on supporting science and technology that benefit all countries.

PORTUGAL stressed marine biotechnology for SDG implementation, and committed to expand knowledge, data sharing and deep ocean observation under its Blue Fund initiative. FINLAND outlined the priorities for its Arctic Council Presidency. The US committed to sustained ocean observation; supported better engagement with social sciences, economics and psychology; and called for joint efforts to develop a comprehensive ocean floor map. BANGLADESH underlined technology transfer and market access as key tools to build capacities for ocean research and sustainable marine resource management. FIJI lamented limited research on climate and oceans focused on SIDS, and invited developed countries to contribute to a joint climate and oceans research facility supported by Germany. BRAZIL emphasized the role of science for all SDGs implementation. CHINA called for promoting the implementation of the UNESCO-IOC Criteria and Guidelines, and transferring technology for new marine industries.

MONACO delineated the objectives of an upcoming voyage of a low-environmental impact vessel to study biodiversity hotspots in Macaronesia. COLOMBIA reported on research efforts, especially in the Caribbean region. The UK highlighted the G-7's commitment to implementing SDG 14, including through support for global ocean observation, especially on climate change and biodiversity; and support for an enhanced system of ocean assessment through the UN Regular Process. CANADA delineated its CAD220 million investment in ocean surveying, and called for partnerships for education and ocean literacy. CUBA noted its platforms for biodiversity conservation, underlining resource mobilization beyond existing funding mechanisms. GERMANY said it is investing €4 billion over ten years in marine research focusing on sea level rise, ocean acidification and land-based pollution. INDIA outlined its Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, which employs 200 researchers and two multi-disciplinary research vessels for research on the Indian Ocean.

ISA reported on commitments to support women scientists in ocean research and a registry of deep-seabed species with information from contractors. WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION (WMO) committed to expand partnerships to improve meteorological data and early warning systems. DEEP OCEAN STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE reported on a growing global scientific network for ocean observations, encouraging

scientific enquiry into the cumulative impacts of climate change within and beyond national jurisdiction. INTER-AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL CHANGE RESEARCH noted the need to build confidence across geo-political boundaries and disciplines for advancing marine science. WORLD OCEAN COUNCIL emphasized using private sector's offshore infrastructure for collecting ocean and climate data, offering to broker relationships between willing companies, governments and scientists. NORWEGIAN SHIPOWNER ASSOCIATION highlighted a report on the shipping industry's contribution to achieving the SDGs and the sector's readiness to contribute to marine data collection.

CHINA ENERGY FUND COMMITTEE reported on supporting small- and medium-scale fisheries in SIDS. LIVING ISLANDS NON-PROFIT illustrated efforts to bring critical scientific knowledge to local communities and local leaders. INTERNATIONAL HYDROGRAPHIC ORGANIZATION emphasized: the lack of reliable depth maps for great parts of the ocean; a global crowdsourcing programme for all vessels to help measure and map the sea; and a 2030 target to map every feature on the seafloor that is larger than 100 meters in size. COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT announced a blue knowledge and innovation hub to foster regional and thematic innovations. UN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (UNESCAP) highlighted the national "blue accounts" initiative to collect data for SDG 14 implementation. UN UNIVERSITY presented its Fisheries Training Programme, noting the need for scientific knowledge and technical capacity for sustainable ocean management, particularly in SIDS and African coastal states.

IN THE CORRIDORS

World Oceans Day celebrations, held in an aquarium-like blue-lit General Assembly hall, were marked by the inspirational words and images of astronauts, aquanauts, artists, conservationists, and private-sector and local-community entrepreneurs. "The preponderance and interconnectedness of the ocean is clear when our blue planet is seen from outer space," declared astronaut Cady Coleman. 'Her deepness' aquanaut Sylvia Earl added: "We have disrupted our planet's life support system. We must remember: no ocean-no us!"

Space-ocean comparisons continued in the afternoon's partnership dialogue when a couple of participants exclaimed: "We know more about the surface of Moon and Mars than we do about the deep ocean floor," calling for serious investments in fundamental ocean research. Others noted that space technologies may help address some ocean research challenges, for instance satellite data. At the end of the day, participants agreed that space science confirms that human life is impossible without the ocean. But the key message, in the words of one participant, is that "we should focus our efforts on letting our ocean heal, rather than attempting to find another blue planet somewhere else in the galaxy!"

