

The United Nations Legal Counsel and the Ocean Conference



In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 70/226, and 70/303, the United Nations Conference to support the implementation of Sustainable Goal 14 (SDG14): “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans and their resources for sustainable development”, took place in New York, from 5 to 9 June 2017. The Ocean Conference coincided, in particular, with the celebration of World Oceans Day on 8 June. The Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel, Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares, including in his capacity as Special Advisor to the Presidents of the Ocean Conference on oceans and legal matters, as well as UN-Oceans Focal Point participated in many events throughout the week. The key message conveyed by the United Nations Legal Counsel to the participants of the Conference was, inter alia, that the implementation of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is of fundamental importance and key to achieving all of the targets of Goal 14, as well as other ocean-related Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Convention is also at the core of a living network of international instruments underpinning Goal 14 of the 2030 Agenda.

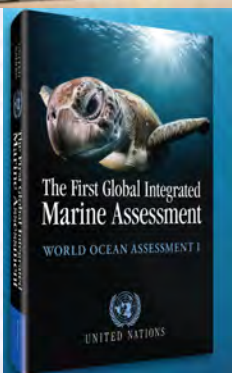
The United Nations Legal Counsel also noted that UNCLOS is a cohesive and coherent single instrument covering all ocean activities. It is a reflection of fundamental imperatives which are still valid today – a need to reserve oceans for peaceful purposes, the need to prevent conflicts over resources of the oceans and seas, the need to regulate the manifold ocean-related human activities and the need for a single overarching instrument since all ocean issues are closely interrelated and need to be considered as a whole.

A few highlights of the United Nations Legal Counsel participation in the Ocean Conference include the following:

Regular Process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



On 5 June 2017, the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel, Miguel de Serpa Soares, participated in important activities focusing on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State the Marine Environment, including Socio-Economic Aspects and the launch of the publication of its first output, namely the First Global Integrated Marine Assessment as well as its Technical Abstract. In that regard, the day for the United Nations Legal Counsel began with the delivery of remarks at a side event organized by the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs (DOALOS/OLA) in conjunction with the Permanent Missions of New Zealand and Barbados. At the side event entitled, “The Regular Process: Strengthening the Science-Policy Interface”, the United Nations Legal Counsel underlined the importance of the Assessment as the outcome of the first cycle of the Regular Process. In this regard, he noted the findings of experts who warned that the oceans’ carrying capacity is near or at its limit, and that urgent action on a global scale is needed to protect the world’s oceans from the many pressures they face [\[Statement\]](#). The Assessment reinforces the science-policy interface by providing policy-makers with information necessary to make decisions regarding the oceans. The Regular Process is instrumental to supporting ocean-related intergovernmental processes, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



Later in the day, the Deputy-Secretary General of the United Nations, Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, and the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Peter Thomson and the United Nations Legal Counsel also delivered remarks at the launch of the publication of the First Integrated Global Assessment report.

Capacity-Building and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

On 7 June, the United Nations Legal Counsel participated in the United Nations - The Nippon Foundation Fellowship Programme 2017 Alumni Meeting [\[Statement\]](#). During the Alumni Meeting, the United Nations Legal Counsel and Mr. Sasakawa, Chairman of The Nippon Foundation, announced the new “Sustainable Ocean Programme”, in the context of the longstanding partnership between the United Nations and the Nippon Foundation. The new programme will build human capacity in developing States in the field of ocean affairs and the law of the sea and related disciplines, as an essential element to building effective frameworks at all scales, across all sectors and in conformity with international law, especially the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the commitments in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular SDG 14. The importance of advancing capacity-building efforts to assist developing States, in particular small island developing States, in meeting international commitments in support of the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources was reiterated by the United Nations Legal Counsel that evening at a reception organized in collaboration with the Global Island Partnership around the theme “Our Oceans, Our Islands, Our Future: Partnering for the Implementation of SDG 14” [\[Statement\]](#).



World Oceans Day 2017



On the morning of 8 June 2017, the United Nations Legal Counsel welcomed delegations and guests to the General Assembly Hall for the celebratory session of World Oceans Day 2017. The message that was given on World Oceans Day 2017 under the theme, “Our Oceans, Our Future”, was to look to the future and promote collaboration and the continued sharing of information and best practices with the view to finding solutions to common problems and addressing effectively the threats that oceans face [\[Message of the Secretary-General on WOD 2017\]](#). The United Nations Legal Counsel noted that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an ambitious framework which should be used to address these threats, improve people’s lives and move forward so as to ensure that our oceans are peaceful, safe and bountiful, and remain healthy as our Blue home. He recalled that the official designation of 8 June as World Oceans Day by the United Nations was meant to raise global awareness of the benefits derived from our oceans, and the current challenges faced by the international community in protecting them. Following his introductory remarks, a fascinating, informative and uplifting show ensued, which included addresses from Ocean Elders Dr. Sylvia Earl and Sir Richard Branson, a short film presented by James Cameron and the Avatar Alliance Foundation, and taped remarks from actor Leonardo DiCaprio. As in past years, the Empire State Building was lit in blue for World Oceans Day.

On the evening of 8 June, the United Nations Legal Counsel hosted the annual World Oceans Day Reception, which was attended by HRH the Crown Princess of Sweden, Heads of State and governments and Ministers. He reminded all that while World Oceans Days is celebrated once a year, on June 8, “we must work to protect our oceans all 365 days of the year.” [\[Statement\]](#)



On Thursday, 8 June 2017, the United Nations Legal Counsel, in his capacity as the focal point for UN Oceans, delivered a statement on behalf of 24 members of UN-Oceans at the plenary meeting. UN-Oceans is the inter-agency coordination mechanism on ocean and coastal issues within the United Nations system which also includes the International Seabed Authority. In his statement, the United Nations Legal Counsel, inter alia, welcomed the request addressed to the Secretary-General, in the “Call for Action”, to enhance inter-agency coordination and coherence throughout the United Nations system on ocean issues, taking into consideration the work of UN-Oceans. He conveyed that UN-Oceans members were ready to build on the activities undertaken thus far to strengthen and promote coordination and coherence of United Nations system activities related to oceans and coastal areas [\[see also statement at UN-Oceans side event on 5 June 2017\]](#). Furthermore, he announced that, as a further testimony to UN-Oceans members’ commitment to “deliver as one”, UN-Oceans had registered a voluntary commitment for the Conference that focused on awareness-raising of relevant regulatory and policy frameworks as well as its members’ activities in support of their implementation [\[Statement\]](#).

SDG14 and international law



On Friday, 9 June 2017, the United Nations Legal Counsel participated as a panellist in Partnership Dialogue 7: Enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. In his presentation, the United Nations Legal Counsel underscored the importance of raising awareness of, and fully implementing, the international legal framework for oceans with at its core the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and highlighted the potential role of multi-stakeholder’s partnerships in this regard [\[Statement\]](#). During the Dialogue, which was co-chaired by H.E. Ms. Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Australia, and H.E. Ms. Judy Wakhungu, Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Natural Resources, Kenya, and moderated by H.E. Mr. Heraldo Muñoz, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chile, participants engaged in a broad and substantive discussion of how to promote the full and effective implementation of international law, as reflected in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, with a view to achieving the ocean-related Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular target 14.c. Target 14.c aims at enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The other panellists were: Mr. Michael Lodge, Secretary-General, International Seabed Authority; Ms. Biliانا Cicin-Sain, President, Global Ocean Forum, Professor of Marine Policy, University of Delaware; and Ms. Florence Galletti, Director of Research, Law of the Sea and Environmental Law, French National Research Institute for Development.