



**UNITED NATIONS  
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

**Side event  
“The International (UN) Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable  
Development”**

**25 September 2017, 6:15-7:45pm  
Conference Room 5**

**Statement by Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares,  
Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and  
United Nations Legal Counsel**

Excellencies,  
Mr. Ryabinin,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today with you to highlight the importance of ocean science for sustainable development and for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It is also a pleasure to lend the support of my Office to the proposal to establish an International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development under the auspices of the United Nations and to cooperate with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO to that end.

The Convention sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. It provides a broad, multi-sectoral and integrated approach to the management of ocean spaces, which also balances the three pillars of sustainable development.

Marine science and the Convention are closely intertwined. The Convention provides the enabling legal framework for the conduct of marine scientific research, which it addresses in its Part XIII, and for the development and transfer of marine technology, which it addresses in its Part XIV.

Marine science, on the other hand, is an essential underpinning of the implementation of the Convention and the achievement of its objectives, namely the equitable and efficient utilization of the resources of our oceans and seas, the conservation of their living resources, and the study, protection and preservation of the marine environment.

We all know that the basis for the sustainable development of our oceans and seas and their resources lies in a strong and reliable knowledge base. Indeed, marine science has a critical role to play in informing decisions about the sustainable



management of natural resources and of human pressures on the marine environment. It also has a critical role in forecasting, mitigating and guiding adaptation to the impacts of increased carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere on oceans.

Distinguished participants,

“Real knowledge is to know one’s ignorance”, Confucius remarked. We know that there are still many things we are ignorant about concerning our oceans. It has been said that we know more about the surface of the Moon and about Mars than we do about the deep sea floor, despite the fact that we have yet to extract a gram of food, a breath of oxygen or a drop of water from those bodies.

The First Global Integrated Marine Assessment – also known as the first World Ocean Assessment, identified major gaps in our knowledge that hamper efforts at sustainably managing human impacts on the ocean. These include gaps in the following areas: physical structure of the ocean; waters of the ocean, including sea temperature (both at the surface and at depth), sea-level rise, salinity distribution, carbon dioxide absorption, and nutrient distribution and cycling; biota of the ocean; and human interactions with the ocean.

An International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development would not only help fill some of the identified knowledge gaps. It would also contribute to strengthening, in a number of ways, the implementation of the Convention, which is key to achieving all of the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 14 and ocean-related Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Decade could also provide valuable support to the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects which aims to reinforce the science-policy interface.

Distinguished participants,

International cooperation is critical to addressing ocean issues at all levels. It is also at the core of the provisions of the Convention on marine scientific research and on the development and transfer of marine technology.

The Convention requires States and competent international organizations to promote and facilitate the development and conduct of marine scientific research, as well as to promote international cooperation in marine scientific research. It also requires the publication and dissemination of information on proposed major programmes and their objectives as well as knowledge resulting from marine scientific research. Under the Convention, all States are also to cooperate, in accordance with their capabilities, to promote actively the development and



transfer of marine science and marine technology on fair and reasonable terms and conditions in order to help developing countries.

An International Decade of Ocean Science would contribute to implementing those obligations by stimulating international cooperation in marine scientific research and sharing of knowledge. By helping understand the impacts of cumulative stressors and promoting interdisciplinary research, it could also contribute to the development of an integrated approach to the management of ocean-related activities. It could further improve the capacity of States, in particular developing States, to acquire the required knowledge to sustainably manage human activities in the oceans and to realize the benefits of sustainable and effective development of marine resources and uses of the oceans. Last but not least, a Decade could contribute to promoting the development and transfer of marine technology. These objectives reflect fully in my view the request in target 14 (a) of the 2030 Agenda.

In closing, I wish to express the readiness and full support of my Office, through the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, to any future steps that would be required to make an International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development a success.