

**World Oceans Day
8 June 2010**

**Roundtable Panel Discussion on the theme
“The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea,
15 years after its entry into force”
(Conference Room 1, NLB 3-5: 30 p.m.)**

**Opening remarks by Ms. Patricia O’Brien,
Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs,
The Legal Counsel**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to this Roundtable Panel Discussion convened to mark the second observance by the United Nations of World Oceans Day. In 2008, by resolution 63/111, the General Assembly decided that, as from 2009, the United Nations would designate 8 June as “World Oceans Day”. With this designation, the United Nations joined many countries and civil society, which have celebrated World Oceans Day annually since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

The theme of this year’s observance of World Oceans Day is “Our oceans: opportunities and challenges”. Oceans play a key role in our lives. They offer opportunities because of their role in food security, sustainable development and scientific progress. They also present a number of challenges: Such as how to address the damaging impact of human activities so that we can ensure that future generations can also benefit from the oceans and their resources. Another challenge is how to tackle the growth of criminal activities in the oceans and seas, including piracy, which has serious implications for the security of navigation and the safety of seafarers.

Moreover, the health and survival of life on earth is very closely linked to the oceans. Oceans play an important role in regulating our climate and are a critical part of the biosphere.

Action at the national and international levels is already being taken within the framework of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. In fact, the Convention continues to act as our guide more than 15 years after its entry into force. Nevertheless, if we are to safeguard the capacity of the oceans to continue to provide opportunities and to serve society's needs, we have to do more. Our efforts to achieve the sustainable management of our oceans, as well as peace and security in the oceans and seas, have to be reinforced.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The official designation of World Oceans Day by the United Nations is an opportunity to raise global awareness of the current opportunities and challenges faced by the international community in sustainable ocean management and ocean governance. This Roundtable Panel Discussion is an occasion for us to address a broad range of issues. Also, we can look at how effectively the Convention is operating as the legal framework for the oceans and seas and its role in the 21st century.

I am also pleased to note that, as was the case last year, this Panel will be moderated by an eminent expert in the law of the sea and environmental law, Professor David Freestone. Professor Freestone previously held high-level functions at the World Bank. Currently, he is Visiting Professor of Comparative Law and Jurisprudence at the George Washington University Law School. I am grateful, Professor Freestone, that you have kindly accepted our invitation to moderate this year's Panel.

Professor Freestone will be joined by six panellists who are also renowned experts and practitioners in ocean affairs. I wish to acknowledge Professor Bernard Oxman, from the University of Miami; Professor Robert Beckman, Director at the Centre for International Law of the National University of Singapore; Ms. Emma Romano Sarne from the Permanent Mission of the Philippines to the United Nations; Professor Ted McDorman, from the University of Victoria, Canada; and Professor Lucia Fanning, Director of Marine Affairs Programme at Dalhousie University, Canada. As I understand it, the panelists will be introduced by Professor Freestone shortly.

Before concluding, I would like to bring to your attention that the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs, has organized other events at Headquarters to mark World Oceans Day. These events include the screening of the Disneynature documentary feature "Oceans". The screening is organized in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of Monaco to the United Nations. I would like to remind you that the viewing of the film will take place from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., in the General Assembly Hall. Your schedule permitting, I encourage you to go and enjoy the film.

Thank you for joining us today. I wish the Panel an interesting discussion. I am pleased to give the floor to Professor Freestone to introduce our Panel.