

**World Oceans Day Event
in cooperation with
the American Museum of Natural History**

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

**Conference Room 6, North Lawn Building
10 June 2013, 1:15pm**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon, I am pleased to welcome you to this event marking the fifth observance of World Oceans Day by the United Nations. [It is good to see so many of you here whom I welcomed this morning at the opening of the 23rd Meeting of States Parties of UNCLOS.]

As you will recall, in 2008 the General Assembly designated 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 celebration is "Oceans and People".

As this theme indicates, oceans play a key role in our lives. They provide us with food, minerals, employment, recreation, water ways for transport, energy sources and potentially much more. However, human activity has frequently resulted in negative impacts. We are all very well aware of the current damages to the oceans and their ecosystems. These include depleted fishery resources, the impacts of climate change, the loss of biodiversity, the deterioration of the marine environment and others.

On the bright side, many of these damages may be reversible through coordinated and focused efforts of the international community, including through implementation of existing legal instruments. These efforts should be assisted by intergovernmental processes, such as the the first world assessment of the state of the oceans, which is expected to be released in 2014.

Member States are also addressing new issues. For example, in recent months, careful attention has been paid to matters such as the conservation of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, including the questions related to marine genetic resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For these reasons, the observance of World Oceans Day by the United Nations is an opportunity to celebrate the oceans and to raise awareness of their crucial importance for our well-being.

As the Secretary-General mentioned in his statement on World Ocean's Day this year: "If we are to fully benefit from the oceans, we must reverse the degradation of the marine environment due to pollution, overexploitation and acidification. I urge all nations to work to this end, including by joining and implementing the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Let us work together to create new waves of action for ocean sustainability – for people and the planet."

In this context, I am pleased to announce the cooperation with the American Museum of Natural History. The Museum is home to more than 200 scientists in various disciplines, such as anthropology, biology, earth and planetary sciences, physical sciences and zoology.

I am particularly pleased with the presence of two of its curators, Dr. Alex de Voogt and Dr. Jennifer Newell.

Dr. de Voogt studied at Leiden University in the Netherlands and at the University of Hawaii. His research interests concentrate on the dispersal of board games and the development and history of scripts.

The dispersal of, in particular, mancala board games, extends from South East and South Asia to Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and parts of South America. Their distribution is related to historical human migration and trade routes. Despite the wide variation of rules, some mancala games have dispersed across cultural, linguistic, and geographic borders without a significant change in playing rules for several hundreds of years. He will explain today how oceans played a role in these developments in his presentation entitled "A confluence of games in the Indian Ocean".

Today's second speaker is Dr. Jennifer Newell. She studied at the Australian National University. Her particular interests are in material culture and the relationship between Pacific Islanders and their environments. Her major research project explores climate change and cultural change in the Pacific. Dr. Newell has previously worked in the Oceanic section at the British Museum (2001-2008) and the National Museum of Australia (2008-2012). She has worked closely with Pacific diaspora communities, and with individual curators, artists and scholars in the Pacific. The title of her presentation is "New ocean relations: Pacific Islanders and climate change."

I note that the latter presentation should be of special interest in light of the forthcoming third Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Global Conference which will be hosted by Samoa in 2014.

Before concluding, I am happy to mention that the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs has organized, in cooperation with Blancpain, Editions Fifty Fathom and DivePhotoGuide a photo exhibition entitled "Oceans", which can be seen in the temporary gallery space in the Secretariat. Last Saturday, the Empire State Building, was lit once again in the colours white, blue and purple on the occasion of World Oceans Day 2013.

Thank you for joining us today. I wish you an interesting event and am pleased to give the floor to today's Moderator, Mr. Vladimir Jares.