



**UNITED NATIONS  
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

**Statement to the 2019 United Nations World Oceans Day Celebration and  
Panel Discussion**

**by**

**Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares**

Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and  
United Nations Legal Counsel,

**7 June 2019**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my capacity as Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, United Nations Legal Counsel and UN-Oceans Focal Point, I am pleased to welcome you to this year's World Oceans Day celebration, and to open today's event.

In 2008, the General Assembly of the United Nations designated the eighth of June "World Oceans Day". Every year on or close to this day, events are held all over the world to raise awareness about the crucial role the ocean plays in our lives and the important ways people can help ensure that the ocean is healthy and productive.

The theme of World Oceans Day this year, "Gender and the ocean", provides an important and timely opportunity to explore the gender dimension of humankind's relationship with the ocean.

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,



As the Secretary-General is currently travelling and could not be here today, he asked me to convey his best wishes for a successful event and to deliver the following World Oceans Day message on his behalf:

“Oceans and seas connect and sustain us. They are home to vast biodiversity and are a vital defence against the global climate emergency.

Yet today the oceans are under unprecedented threat. In the past 150 years, about half of all living coral has been lost. In the past four decades, plastic pollution in oceans has increased tenfold. A third of fish stocks are now overexploited.

This year's observance of World Oceans Day highlights the gender dimensions of our relationship with the ocean.

The effects of pollution and climate change on the oceans have a disproportionate impact on women. For too long, women have been unable to share equally in ocean-supplied benefits. Women represent half the work force engaged in the catching and harvesting of wild and farmed fish, yet are paid substantially less than men. Women are also often segregated into low-skilled and unrecognized labour, such as fish processing, and are denied a decision-making role.

Similar treatment occurs in related sectors such as shipping, coastal tourism and marine science, where the voices of women are frequently not heard.

Confronting gender inequality is essential to achieving the ocean-related Goal and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We must ensure an end to unsafe work conditions and guarantee that women have an equal role in managing ocean-related activities.

I urge governments, international organizations, private companies, communities and individuals to promote gender equality and the rights of women and girls as a crucial contribution to meeting ocean challenges.





We must also act across an array of sectors to address the conflicting demands from industry, fishing, shipping, mining and tourism that are creating unsustainable levels of stress on marine and coastal ecosystems. The “Call for Action” adopted at the United Nations Oceans Conference in 2017 helps to point the way, and as we look ahead to the next such gathering, in Lisbon in 2020, let us all do our utmost to protect and preserve this essential resource for sustainable development.”

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having listened to the message of the Secretary-General on the occasion of World Oceans Day, addressing this year’s theme of “Gender and the ocean”, I am hopeful that today’s discussions will foster more understanding and awareness of the important issues he raised, as well as action at all levels.

During this morning’s story-telling segment, we will hear from some exceptional women and men regarding personal experiences which illustrate some of the gender dimensions of ocean affairs, in different regions from around the world. We will discover the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment across all oceans-related sectors through these powerful first-hand accounts from community leaders and change-makers.

Immediately before lunch, we will have the announcement of the winners of this year’s World Oceans Day Photo Competition. This annual event always features stunning images, the best of which from last year are displayed in the visitors’ lobby just next to the entrance of this conference room.

This afternoon, our expert panel will focus on various aspects of the theme Gender and the Ocean, as presented by experts working in different sectors and fields from around the world. This solution-orientated discussion aims to help us understand how to make progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in these sectors and fields, including through the exchange of experiences and lessons learned. The expert panel will be followed by a closing keynote address by Dr. Silvia Earle, as well as closing remarks by the President of





the General Assembly at its seventy-third session, Her Excellency, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés.

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

In closing, I wish to thank all of those who have collaborated in the preparation for the marking of World Oceans Day this year. First, a special recognition to all the members of the Friends of World Oceans Day informal working group, who have worked tirelessly for months – this is a true example of what World Oceans Day stands for: inclusivity, diversity and collaboration.

I also recognize and thank:

The Explorers Club, which hosts a fascinating and important programme for World Ocean Week - which I had the honor to open on Monday in the company of many leading scientists and explorers from around the world, many of whom are with us here today;

Mr. Curtis, as well as Blancpain and WeOcean, who have generously supported the participation of some of today's speakers;

The United Nations Office for Partnerships and the Peace Boat, who will be graciously hosting a reception this evening; and Our World Oceans Day Production Partner, Oceanic Global, without whom this event would not have been possible at this scale.

In recognizing the contribution of Oceanic Global, it is also now my pleasure to give the floor to Ms. Lea d'Auriol, Founder and Executive Director of Oceanic Global, who will be serving as Moderator for the remainder of this opening segment.

Ms. d'Auriol, thank you for your strong commitment and contribution to the marking of World Oceans Day this year at the United Nations Headquarters. The floor is yours.

