

**World Oceans Day  
8 June 2009**

**Expert Panel Discussion on the theme  
“Our oceans, our responsibility”**  
*General Assembly Hall  
3-5 p.m.*

**Draft opening remarks by Ms. Patricia O’Brien, The Legal Counsel**

Dear Experts and Participants,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this Expert Panel convened to mark the first 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 joins 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 inaugural observance of World Oceans Day by the United Nations is “Our oceans, our responsibility”. The oceans are a vital and critical part of the biosphere and, as such, are essential to the health and survival of all life. The oceans and their resources contribute to food security, are a source of livelihood for millions of people around the world, are the primary means by which international trade takes place, and are a source of recreation and tourism. Science also shows that marine ecosystems have a role in climate regulation. At the same time, our oceans are increasingly suffering from the effects of overfishing, destructive fishing practices, pollution, in particular from land-based activities, introduction of invasive alien species, destruction of habitats, climate change, and other effects.

At the same time, new uses of the oceans, including carbon sequestration and ocean fertilization as climate change mitigation measures, are adding their footprint to that of traditional uses. Crimes at sea are also threatening life at sea and safety of navigation.

For a long time, the oceans have suffered from an “out of sight, out of mind” perception. The prospects for the oceans are extremely negative if no improvement is made to the way in which we manage our oceans. It is widely recognized that we need to step up our efforts to achieve the sustainable management of our oceans as well as peace and security in the oceans and seas. Those efforts can only be successful if they are supported by all stakeholders. Also, it is not only necessary to increase global cooperation to address multiple challenges. We must go further than that and re-invent how we work together to deliver collective solutions to our collective problems. This new multilateralism, called for by the Secretary-General, is particularly necessary in the context of the oceans. It is also important to address climate change, which is a priority for the Secretary-General. As he has remarked:

“Climate change affects every aspect of society, from the health of the global economy to the health of our children. [...] It is at the core of nearly all the major challenges we face today.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The official designation of World Oceans Day by the United Nations is an opportunity to raise global awareness of the current challenges faced by the international community in sustainable ocean management. This Expert Panel is an occasion for us to discuss a broad range of issues, including by highlighting emerging issues and possible ways forward in ocean affairs and the law of sea. It also provides an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea since its adoption in 1982, as well as on future prospects and challenges in the implementation of the regime it established.

This Panel will be moderated by an eminent expert in the law of the sea and environmental law, Professor David Freestone. Professor Freestone, who previously held high-level functions at the World Bank, is currently Visiting Professor of Comparative Law and Jurisprudence at the George Washington University Law School and at the United Nations University, and senior adviser to the USA Multilateral Office of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. I am very pleased and grateful, Professor Freestone, that you have kindly accepted our invitation. Professor Freestone will be joined by five panellists who are also eminent experts and practitioners in ocean affairs: Ambassador Djalal, Dr. Lorna Inniss, Dr. Magnus Ngoile, Dr. Harlan Cohen, and Dr. John Stegeman, all of whom will be introduced by Professor Freestone in due time.

Before I end, I would like to bring to your attention the fact that the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs, in cooperation with the Department of Public Information, has organized some other events at Headquarters to mark World Oceans Day, including a photography exhibit in the corridor near the Vienna Café, and the screening of a documentary on ocean acidification in Trusteeship Council Chamber, which will commence at 6 p.m. this evening. Your schedule permitting, I encourage you also to attend those events.

Thank you again for your attendance, and I hope you enjoy this discussion. I will now give the floor to Professor Freestone to introduce our Panel.