

# Ocean Governance XXI

## Commemorative Session of the Lisbon Declaration of 1998

12th December 2008, 16H00

### Speech of Mário Soares, former chair of the IWCO

1. It is immensely satisfying for me to share this meeting with the former members of the Independent World Commission for the Oceans and other personalities who have been active or associated with the Commission's work. I would also like to welcome the national and international personalities who have also honoured us with their presence.

Although we had initially thought of resuming the decentralised consultations which characterised the work of the IWCO in the 1990's and led to the publication and dissemination of the report called "The Ocean, Our Future" in 13 languages, the present state of affairs led us to believe that it would be more useful to include this session in the on-going reflection about the interaction and growing impact of human activity on the Ocean. In this way we plan to continue with the project we've been so enthusiastic about, and bring about a **responsible Ocean governance in the 21st century**, and raising the awareness of governments and civil society about the need for converging strategies and initiatives to respond to needs of a Sustainable Development of the Ocean and protect the environmental balance of the Planet Earth.

We recognise the fact that this would involve changing individual and collective cultures and attitudes, with all the difficulties that would entail. But given the scientific assessments made of anthropogenic impacts on the environment, one of the most worrying of which is climate change, it is vital for us to move from talking and into acting as rapidly as possible, and to move away from the political rhetoric, which has frozen any action, and into concrete measures.

That's why we made the most of the ephemerid of the public presentation of the IWCO report and the Lisbon Declaration during EXPO 98, the International Year of the Oceans, to reactivate our "navigation" towards targets which would still be medium and long term, but supported by immediate objectives. We've given special thought to our contribution to the Agenda of the World Conference on the Oceans (Manado, Indonesia, May 2009) and to the debate on the Oceans during the next session of the United Nations General Assembly (New York, Autumn 2009), and finally to collaborating with the preparatory work of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, which will address the Affairs of the Sea in 2014-15.

2. Ten years on, and the IWCO Report, "The Ocean. Our Future", is still the object of analysis and reflection, which proves just how justified and pertinent it has been, thanks to the objective, open and participatory way it was written with the active involvement of numerous specialists from different countries and cultures.

At this time, I would like to express my appreciation of the confidence placed in the actions of the IWCO. As I said in the preface to the Report, “I’m not an Ocean specialist. Far from it. But the Sea has always interested, attracted and motivated me (...) I belong, body and soul, to an old nation with a very strong cultural identity, which has had the same borders for almost nine centuries. And that’s why I’ve always felt that it’s the Oceans that make being Portuguese so unique and which have been a privileged environment for human contact and therefore for dialogue and solidarity, while at the same time have encouraged social interaction and the exchange of knowledge between peoples and civilisations”.

I wrote in the preface that, “I have no doubt at all that the key to the next century is solidarity”. The protection of the Oceans is of direct importance for our future and for the future of the generations to come. We can’t put it off any longer because there’s no time to lose!” Above all because we’ve already lost so much.

3. Since that time, I’ve followed Ocean Affairs at national and international levels. I’ve seen that, though erratic, the process of structuring a New Regime based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLS), in articulation with Agenda 21, approved by the Rio Conference, and other complementary international instruments (such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity), has facilitated the adoption of measures for a management which is more balanced and compatible with the objectives of a Sustainable Development of the Ocean. Though it still falls short of what we want, we hope this process will continue to develop towards greater respect for International Law, and towards more equity and solidarity between States and peoples.

Your couldn’t say that the political situation in the world has been most favourable to these objectives over the last few years, marked as it has been by attempts to create more hegemony rather than the multilateral system of the United Nations. For decades scientists and organizations for the management of live resources, particularly within the FAO, have warned about the progressive degradation of the fish reserves. The same thing has happened with the state of the marine environment, particularly in coastal areas where the destruction of habitats has been alarming, but also in the high seas and the seabeds and seamounts, all of which has affected biodiversity.

As well as the serious impact of climate change on the environment in general and the rise in the sea level and other risks associated with that phenomenon, now another “spectre” is looming over the situation – this time the acidification of the sea with the serious ecological risk that implies.

I won’t into details which would be more properly addressed by specialists, but I will say that this situation and current trends should be considered very carefully and the States and the world community should mobilise together. The very nature of the accumulating crises is such that it is beginning to be a patently common or converging cause: man’s ability to affect the balance of the planet, leading us to all this era “anthropocenic”. This process has had a cumulative and global effect on the ocean, with serious consequences for the future of humanity.

The conclusions drawn by the IWCO report on institutional aspects (Chapter 6) are more significant in this context. But these conclusions are still “floating” – if I may use the expression – on the still waters of political will, contrary to the appeal made ten years ago to “go forward with the process of change and innovation within the United Nations System”, as a contribution to the peaceful use of the Ocean approved by United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The same can be said about the status of the High Seas as a “space under public protection” – something which is essential - and about the status and protection of biodiversity, particularly in the International Seabed Zone, given their potential for genetic resources and biotechnological applications.

At the time we also appealed for the adoption of “institutional arrangements which would promote the participation and involvement of all parties interested in the Cause of the Ocean, facilitating access to information and participation in the decision-making processes”.

Despite all of the measures taken, it has still not been possible to make the Independent World Observatory operational and play its role for the dissemination of information and as an informal system for reporting violations of the Law of the Sea and crisis situations.

The recent analysis by former members of the IWCO and other specialists, co-ordinated by Prof. Mário Ruivo and Dr. Jean-Pierre Levy, and circulated as a reference document for this Session, shows the significant progress that has been made in some areas of Ocean management, at national, or at regional and global levels, as well as new challenges and risks, particularly those brought by climate change.

Despite the contradictions which have characterised the European Union at times, the adoption of an Integrated European Maritime Policy and its environmental pillar, the EU Marine Strategy, following the first European meeting of ministers responsible for Sea and Ocean Affairs during the Portuguese Presidency (in December 2007) is definitely an encouraging sign.

4. The Ocean is the unique heritage of all of the earth's inhabitants and as such should be properly managed. That objective is a powerful stimulus for solidarity between different peoples. As I have had the occasion to declare, "It is imperative for us to bequeath this heritage to our descendents so they won't criticise us for our selfishness some day in the future". To achieve this we have to continue our efforts to make all levels of society - governments, non-governmental organisations, economic sectors and civil society in general – more aware and actively mobilise, using democratic and participatory means, to ensure the responsible governance of the inner space of our planet, which is now in an advanced stage of tridimensional occupation, thanks to the advances made in knowledge and technologies stimulated by innovation and the economic dynamic.

For this objective to be achieved, not only do measures have to be applied for an efficient integrated management of the maritime spaces, but the social environment must also be receptive. It is therefore crucial to guarantee access to information and to promote a new culture of global and intergenerational solidarity.

But it's not enough to talk about these intentions. It's imperative for us to move into action and adopt specific measures, which means that the governments will have to recognise them as priorities and must feel responsible as mediators and guardians of the Ocean's future.

Analysis of the situation has led us to launch the appeal of the IWCO and the Lisbon Declaration of 1998 once again today "For an Ocean Governance in the 21st Century: Democracy, Equity and Peace". A new appeal now centred on the mobilisation of the political will - and the government in particular – and on institutional changes which will make it possible to respond efficiently to the challenges of a responsible governance of the Ocean for the well-being and future of Humanity.

Lisbon, 12th December 2008