

### 3.1. Statement of the Chair of the State of IOC

Dear delegates.

In accordance with rule of procedure 8.1(a), this agenda item corresponds to the statement of the Chair on recent developments in the work of the Commission and perspectives for the coming years.

As I expressed at the opening of this Assembly, reality turned out to be very different from what we expected. Nevertheless, despite the difficult circumstances, our commitment to the ocean remained the main driver for our actions in order to fulfil our mandate.

In our own IOC, we analysed each case, each circumstance, and came forward with alternatives not only to continue but to expand our work. The new normal in which we are living, with its virtual platforms, created additional opportunities for increased communication, and our ability to participate in multiple subjects and debates. Just the simple exercise of counting virtual meetings, webinars, information sessions, provides a clear indication of how much our communications have increased. This shift from meeting in person to remote participation has allowed us all to be present in multiple and almost synchronic events around the world. Remote sessions were implemented not only for our 53<sup>rd</sup> Executive Council last February, but also for meetings of our primary subsidiary bodies, projects, and activities.

Through IOC Circular Letter 2835, I proposed holding this 31st session of our Assembly following a hybrid model, with remote plenary sessions combined with *in praesentia* elections of the Board of Officers and members of the Executive Council. We have carefully prepared and crafted this meeting to ensure the quality of the debate and to allow the decision-making process to be inclusive, transparent, and effective, complying with our Rules of Procedure in full.

Begging your indulgence, I will repeat here what I stated at the opening of the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Executive Council last February. We can execute our mandate and act as one for the benefit of all only if we continue to operate as we traditionally do: in a transparent, participatory, and constructive manner, working together to be a better scientific and technical body.

Current circumstances have significantly reduced the time available compared to past sessions of the Assembly. Traditionally, our Assembly represented the opportunity for our programmes, subsidiary bodies as well as Member States to present the key developments during the intersessional period, propose activities and projects and promote synergies. We have therefore created a [series of webinars](#) held between 31<sup>st</sup> of May and 11<sup>th</sup> of June as an additional mechanism to inform our Member States .

Throughout these months of remote work, we have accumulated extremely valuable experience and it is highly probable that some of the incorporated methodologies have come to stay with us. That is why I proposed to the 53 Executive Council entrusting the Financial Committee, as part of its duties pertaining to IOC governance, methods of work and procedures, with the initial analysis of a review and possible updating of the Commission's Rules of Procedure, with a view to adjusting them to the existing possibilities and current reality, possible future scenarios, and capitalizing on the experience gathered and best practices within UNESCO and the UN system.

The financial situation remains challenging and, despite the support of the Director-General of UNESCO, the support and contributions of the Member States, and the contributions of various donors and actors involved in ocean issues, this is a matter of utmost concern. IOC's

involvements keep growing, but available human and financial resources have not kept the same pace. We owe to ourselves an in-depth analysis of the overall situation and perspectives as well as our strategy, business model and narrative to attract additional donors. We risk otherwise to turn our actions more opportunistic than strategic, with the implications such a change has.

In 2005, we were challenged by a document under the title "[We have a Problem](#)". In the aftermath of the terrible tsunami on 26 December 2004 in the Indian Ocean, and in face of a significant reduction of our budget, the document was putting the light on our decisions and their impact in determining our future, not through a mere change in the balance of issues of interest, but by affecting our identity as an intergovernmental oceanographic commission. We were then asked to take a break in our daily routine to think about: "where we are", "where we want to go", being a unique scientific and technical body within the UN system dedicated to ocean science and services.

All recent audits and assessments of the IOC have indicated that while it represents a most productive and highly-returning investment of Member States into the future knowledge-based sustainable ocean services, this investment is drastically insufficient, and that IOC is understaffed and under-resourced to achieve its expanding mandate. This is a very clear call to action that we cannot and must not ignore.

Our Commission is seen as a valued partner by UN frameworks related or with links to the ocean and recognised as an authoritative source of clear technical contributions, scientific knowledge, and uniquely positioned to bridge the science-to-policy gap.

Some examples stem out of our active contribution in the Preparatory Meeting of the Twenty-Fifth Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), organized in Costa Rica, and COP 25 (the 25th Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, the "blue COP"), the third session of the intergovernmental conference on an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) and the subsequent online activities, in all of which I worked together with our dedicated Secretariat and represented this ocean community. More recent developments include my participation in International Seabed Authority events such as the introduction of its Marine Scientific Research Action Plan in support of the UN Decade for Ocean Science for Sustainable Development or the webinar on occasion of the World Ocean Day on the cooperation with OBIS (IOC-UNESCO) focusing on the partnership recently announced to expand, through ISA DeepData, access to biodiversity data. Within UNESCO, last November, we had an extremely productive meeting with the Scientific and Technical Advisory Body to the 2001 Convention, Underwater Cultural Heritage, where we discussed matters related to the Ocean Decade and our common and shared interests and responsibilities.

On November 2020, I joined other experts in a webinar organised by the World Maritime University on Empowering women in the Ocean Decade. This was an opportunity to share IOC's experience and initiatives and join forces to bridge the existing barriers. Our [Global Ocean Science Report 2020](#) shows that, on average, 39% of ocean scientists are women. This is about 10% higher than the general average for science overall. The Ocean Decade will provide an enabling environment to overcome gender, generation as well as regional barriers.

On January 1st, we kicked off an unprecedented period, the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021–2030, crystallizing an idea that saw the light in this Commission. Throughout the past three years we have devoted the required time and effort, and more, to propose, discuss and consolidate an implementation plan to address the

Decade challenges and achieve the agreed goals. On 31 December 2020, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted resolution 75/239, wherein it welcomes the preparatory work conducted by the IOC and takes note with appreciation of the implementation plan for the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. We have been further entrusted with coordinating the implementation of the Decade and report back periodically. This requires proper attention for we need to equip ourselves in terms of human and financial resources to fulfil the requirements associated to such tasks.

Quoting a member of the Executive Planning Group, following the announcement of endorsement of programmes and contributions made last week on occasion of the World Ocean Day, cheers were heard from all over the world about the fantastic array of programmes that have been endorsed to begin the Ocean Decade. There was great excitement to see programmes related to expanding participation in the Decade, looking at historic and cultural aspects of the ocean, and other activities that will bolster participation and recognize the many ways that the ocean affects us all.

At the same time, there might be a perception that despite investing our best efforts in preparing for the Ocean Decade, we have left on the backburner the adequate development, or discussion, or agreement on our own IOC specific contributions to the Decade. And even we would all agree that there are great opportunities for IOC to contribute even more within the context of the Ocean Decade, and that the Decade is a unique source for developing and further strengthening partnerships and synergies, some members of our community may be of the view that the Decade actions constitute possible competitors, or even a blurring factor of IOCs role and responsibilities. The latter perceptions are something we need to avert through proper discussions and a proactive attitude.

Among our different contributions, last December we published the GOSR 2020. This report constitutes a critical step in identifying capabilities, resources, and constraints in our Member States, providing invaluable information to decision-makers.

Despite the challenging circumstances, our global programmes, regional subsidiary bodies and other subsidiary bodies were able to meet remotely, report on the key developments during the intersessional period, agree on future steps and recommend actions to this Assembly, clearly demonstrating the resilience and commitment of this community dedicated to ocean matters. We continued the development of the Ocean Data and Information System (ODIS), we launched projects such as the Ocean InfoHub, a system of transfer of marine technology; the second phase of the OceanTeacher Global Academy (OTGA-2) and its network of training centres, or the Pacific islands Marine bioinvasions Alert Network, thanks to the kind support of the Government of Flanders (Kingdom of Belgium).

Capacity development remains one of the fundamental tenets of our Commission, and it is properly portrayed at the centre of our six core functions. It enables all Member States to participate in and benefit from ocean research and services which are meaningful drivers to sustain development and human welfare on the planet. Several of our initiatives have a specific focus on Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Pacific Small Island Developing States. I wish to take advantage of this opportunity to remind Member States who have not done so yet, to designate your IOC Capacity Development Focal Point, since after the Circular Letters issued in 2018 and 2020, only one third of our Member States has designated a CD Focal Point.

Going through the documents prepared for this Assembly, after having followed the thematic webinars, we can certainly see very good progress, and yet I firmly believe we can do even more to continue positioning IOC in the global context.

It is now time for acknowledgements. A special thank you to our whole Secretariat for their impressive work and dedication, in the forefront and in the background, at Headquarters and in the field. My thanks also go to my fellow Officers who have taken on board multiple tasks and carried them out with great professionalism and commitment for the common good. Finally, allow me to acknowledge the always sound advice and wisdom of our previous distinguished Chairperson, Professor Peter Haugan of Norway.