

Mr Executive Secretary,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be able to talk to you today about what I believe to be one of the major stakes for this century: the preservation of the seas and oceans.

So I would like to express my most heartfelt gratitude to the organisers of this event and, of course, the Korean authorities who, in choosing the oceans as the main theme of the 2012 Yeosu International Expo, are sending a strong message to the rest of the world.

For millennia, humans focused on the conquest, control and exploitation of land.

The seas and oceans were perceived only as means of conquest, exchange and subsistence, depending on the times and cultures.

While the land seemed to be at the disposal of human beings who thought its resources were inexhaustible, maritime areas were seen as immense zones, often fertile, sometimes hostile.

Today's world knows the reality of these vast expanses whose equilibria it now threatens for having neglected them too long.

We are beginning to understand that the perils confronting the world begin by affecting the seas, so we must now turn our attention to them if we wish to be able to fend off the dangers threatening us.

I am referring, of course, to global warming whose effects on the sea have intensified and become truly dramatic.

We are aware of the changes in currents and their consequences on ecosystems, the undermining of Polar areas by accelerated warming and, since the 2009 Declaration of Monaco, by which a hundred and fifty scientists from twenty-six countries alerted the world, the reality of the acidification which has already struck the Planet's oceans and exacerbates the warming of the entire biosphere.

The seas are also specifically the victims of the many threats to biodiversity as observed in the Mediterranean.

Indeed, this sea concentrates nearly 10% of the Planet's species in less than 1% of its maritime surface area, also exploited by one hundred and fifty million inhabitants on its shores, to which nearly three hundred million tourists must be added every year.

Regarding biodiversity, we can easily see that our coasts, which are at the heart of the Yeosu International Expo, are just as subject to constant depredations due to human activity.

Nor do we give greater consideration to the ocean depths, so poorly known and now estimated to have major reserves of biodiversity.

Their flora and fauna, too, are directly threatened by human activities.

Overfishing is at the heart of these problems, of course, along with many other irresponsible fishing practices that damage the seafloor, threaten stocks and prevent healthy reproduction of species.

And aquaculture has a role, too, in particular when up to five kilos of fish are required to produce just one.

This is how the oceans fall victim to the excessive appetites of a civilisation that believes it can exploit down to the tiniest parcel of this Planet.

A civilisation which, faced with shrinking land resources, now plunges to the depths of the oceans to scour for new resources.

We now know that, with the rarefaction of fossil fuels, the constant rise in their price and advances in technology, many underwater hydrocarbon deposits untapped, because they were too complex or costly to exploit, have suddenly become profitable.

Every time, such so-called progress leads to further degradation of our biotope.

All these ills that plague our seas have a single cause: human incompetence and irresponsibility.

This is what makes them complex and hard to apprehend, while at the same time giving us a glimmer of hope, on condition we are able to prepare a response on a par with these perils.

We must begin by aiming to convince our fellows of the need to change our ways and look at least beyond our immediate short-term interests.

This entails multiplying such initiatives as this International Expo and taking advantage of every opportunity to disseminate information, support reflection and instigate debate.

But our action must also be concrete, on all levels, since time is short.

It is in the name of this need to take action that I found my own personal commitment, that of my Government and the Foundation I created in 2006 to complete my political action in the three key areas of fighting climate change, protecting biodiversity and preserving water resources on our Planet.

It is the same rigorous approach that we witnessed yesterday for the Third Monaco Blue Initiative, a structure dedicated to dialogue between champions of the environment, scientists, political decision makers and economic players.

Here, exceptionally, we organised the session dedicated to Marine Protected Areas for the Yeosu International Expo. This is one example among others of the will to open up that motivates us and the method that guides us, based on dialogue and communication.

This year's meeting enabled us to take a closer look at Marine Protected Areas, which are currently the most promising prospect for reconciling human needs and environmental requirements.

Unfortunately, these areas dedicated to preserving ecosystems still represent only 0.1% of the Planet's maritime surface, while there is already some form of protection for 10% of land surface.

This is to say that there remains a great to be done, in particular tireless work wherever new legal structures can be adopted and developed.

In this respect, of course, the decisions made two years ago in Nagoya under the auspices of the Convention on Biological Diversity marked a major turning point. While this is something I staunchly support, we must now bring it to fruition with initiatives like the one that brings us here today.

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I also hope that, for these specific protective measures as for all issues relating to conservation of the oceans, this month's Rio +20 United Nations Conference on Global Warming will help us progress further.

I will be there with the firm intention of defending the future of the seas and oceans.

Similarly, the thirtieth anniversary of the Montego Bay Convention on the Law of the Sea should offer an opportunity for constructive dialogue this year in view of its update.

Indeed, we have no choice but to move forward collectively, in the context of the United Nations, which is alone in being able to reconcile the many, often divergent interests. It alone can give the oceans their true dimension, that of global stakes, since it concerns all of humankind.

Beyond the short-term negotiations announced by these events, which we must make understood and accepted, it is indeed these expanses with no resident population, which means they have no representatives, are just as essential for the survival of humankind as expanses on land.

And that their future is as important for the peoples living on their shores as for the lands on which they live.

Such is the main challenge for our seas and oceans: to make them into fully-fledged political resources.

Indeed, the oceans are heat regulators, mitigators of global warming.

They also act as lungs for our Planet, precious oxygen generators. They are sources of food, activity and energy.

These are mainly places for dreaming, catalysts for progress and adventure.

The way towards a truly responsible Planet will be long.

But, in the words of Martin Luther King: “Take the first step in faith. You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.” I am happy to take this step with you today.

Thank you.