

A Message to the Peoples and Nations of the World On Behalf of the Ocean

(On the occasion of a celebration for the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission/UNESCO, June 08, 2010)

For generations the ocean has been regarded as massive, impenetrable and invulnerable. This is a false concept that can no longer be accepted with impunity. Relatively it is not massive, together with the land surface and atmosphere it forms only a thin skin between the thousands of kilometres of rock and magma beneath and the infinity of space above. It is a planetary meniscus on which our present environment and our lives depend. Secondly it is no longer impenetrable; today a growing fraction of our mineral resources comes from beneath the sea floor. Our automated instruments are scattered in the ocean waters across the globe. Researchers are now reaching into the depths, and uncovering some of its secrets, although results suggest that these are merely harbingers of what is still unknown. Finally the ocean is not invulnerable. The wastes of our society, flowing from the land, and through the atmosphere, from agriculture, industry and a growing urban population can be seen in the fragile coastal waters and measured even in the centre of the water masses.

However, the context for this message to the world should not be one of doom. Thankfully our ocean is still vital; its life, beauty and power still amaze us. We can, and should, celebrate and recognize the importance of the ocean to the culture, economy and well-being of our society. But the ocean does deserve our attention. As a society we must collectively and unambiguously acknowledge the importance of the oceans to our existence on the planet. The ocean cleanses the air we breathe; it influences our weather, climate, and the water on which we depend. We must be aware of the changes we bring to the ocean and the consequences of our actions. For this we require information and the knowledge, insight and determination to use that information collectively and wisely.

We have a responsibility to our children, their children and their children's children. Our legacy must be a sustainable and healthy environment. It is a responsibility that transcends national, political and social differences. As one, we are the people of the Earth and we must act together to protect and perpetuate the environment on which we depend.

The attached call on behalf of the ocean is a plea to all for an adequate and responsive recognition of the importance of the ocean.

*"...I must go down to the seas again/for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied..."*

John Masefield (1878 - 1967)