

## 50 years of ocean studies

**The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC) inaugurated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations on 8 June, World Ocean Day, at a ceremony and exhibition held at UNESCO in Paris.**

The celebrations offered a chance to showcase the IOC's achievements over the past 50 years and consider its future role. 'The IOC is a standard-bearer for UNESCO', said Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO. 'Indeed, it is integral to my vision of our Organization's role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: providing essential continuity while responding to the changing needs of today's and tomorrow's world. [The IOC's] contribution to climate science is a good example,' she observed in the company of Assistant Director-General and Executive Secretary of the IOC Wendy Watson-Wright, French Secretary of State for Sustainable Development Valérie Létard and French navigator and IOC spokeswoman Maud Fontenoy. 'The challenge posed by climate change is a main focus of my mandate and I recognize the vital role the IOC must and will play in that regard,' Bokova said. She highlighted the role of the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), the ocean component of the Global Climate Observing System which supports the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The role of GOOS is continually evolving but keeping the system maintained is critical to ensuring that data are available on demand, such as when a disaster strikes. Since the explosion and sinking of an offshore drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico on 20 April, flow-rate modelers from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution have estimated that 20 000–40 000 barrels of oil – and possibly 50 000 barrels – have been leaking into the Gulf every day. US scientists used models developed with GOOS

data to produce a study released on 3 June which indicates that, within weeks, oil from the massive spill might extend thousands of kilometres along the Atlantic coast and into the open ocean. The spill has demonstrated how useful regular ocean observations are to disaster response – and how inadequate ocean observing systems are, even in a rich country like the USA. Vital equipment for oil spill response, such as coastal radar which could provide real-time data on surface currents and thus the oil spill movements, has either not been deployed or been inadequately maintained in the Gulf of Mexico.

During the anniversary ceremony, Geoff Holland, former chair and architect of the IOC's *Ocean Charter* in 1998, presented an *Ocean Call* appealing for greater priority to be given to programmes in coastal and ocean management, ocean sciences and ocean technologies.

Representatives of a youth delegation also presented a call for action from policy-makers and a list of their own commitments. 'Deeply troubled by the rapid degradation of the oceans and seas, and in support of the recognition of the ocean as a public good for all humanity, we ask for the establishment of a global ethics board, which we propose to name the United Oceans,' they said. Since 1998, close to 800 young people have taken part in national, regional and international youth delegations and parliaments organized with the help of the World Ocean Network. The next youth delegations in 2011 and 2012 will take place in the Caribbean and South Africa.

From 40 nations when it first came into being into 1960, the UNESCO-IOC has grown to 138 Member States today, including a number of landlocked countries.

For details: [www.unesco.org/en/ioc-50anniversary](http://www.unesco.org/en/ioc-50anniversary);  
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on the oil spill: [www.ioc-goos.org/content/view/265/48/](http://www.ioc-goos.org/content/view/265/48/)  
Cambridge University Press retraces the past 50 years in *Troubled Waters* (see page 24)



Photo: Paul Mauricio/Scripps Institution of Oceanography

*A research and training vessel from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (USA) cruises past an iceberg in the Antarctic. As part of anniversary celebrations, a number of countries<sup>1</sup> have announced research and training cruises for 2010 and 2011: Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, China, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Russia, Sweden, Thailand, Tunisia, Ukraine, the UK, USA and Venezuela.*