

## **TWENTY YEARS AFTER:**

### **Souvenirs of the Secretary of IOC**

1. In the context of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of IOC, when trying to better understand the present looking into the future, I decided to look back at notes and reports of the governing bodies of the Commission to match souvenirs with factual memories. Not an easy task as, for more than fifty years, my professional life and IOC have been closely intermingled. That allowed me to recall the Commission's evolution, keeping in mind the vision of the founding fathers who conceived the IOC in the 1960s as an institutional experiment to promote learning about the nature and ocean resources through the concerted action of its Member States; indeed, an enlightened approach reflecting wider expectations about the role of the United Nations system. In that context, some thought that a joint oceanographic mechanism would be desirable, an approach favoured by FAO. Finally, circumstances advised that such mechanism be established within UNESCO, while exploring an interagency agreement to enhance cooperation in programmes of mutual interest. The road was opened to IOC and ICSPRO.

As pointed out by Agustin Ayala-Castañares, Chairman of IOC (XII Assembly, 1982), the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) –in which IOC was deeply involved –

and the corresponding Convention “will be the culmination of an unprecedented effort in the field of international law and will mark the conclusion of a historical stage in marine affairs at the global level. Because of this Conference and of the importance which the international community attributed to the oceans, marine sciences are now being recognized as an essential factor in development at the highest governmental level”. He also recalled that “It has been the Assembly view that priority should be given to the recognition of the status of IOC as a specialized joint mechanism within the United Nations system for marine science affairs. One of (IOC’s) aspirations is that the post of Secretary of the Commission should be graded at a satisfactory level (...)”.

In those days IOC was deeply shaped, on the one hand, by an active group of leading scientists and experts and, on the other hand, by a number of distinguished personalities who had been involved in the negotiation of UNCLOS and looked forward to the role and functions of IOC in accordance with the Convention signed in 1982. This paved the way for the adoption by the IOC Assembly, in 1987, of Resolution XIV-19 on “Proposed Amendments of the Statutes of the Commission”, which was unanimously approved later by the General Conference of UNESCO.

In this context, IOC took the initiative to explore ways and means to respond to Annex VI of UNCLOS by launching (Resolution XII-8) a “Comprehensive Plan to a Major Assistance Programme to Enhance

the Marine Science Capabilities of Developing Countries” and related Marine Science Country Profiles to “provide a system-wide basis for the mobilization of multi-bi assistance required”.

In response to the new ocean regime, IOC entered a process of rethinking its role and functions within the UN system and of clarification of its relationship with UNESCO. This was indeed a crucial matter in view of the decision of two Member States (USA, UK) to withdraw from UNESCO while remaining members of IOC, in compliance with Art 4-A 1 of the Statutes, thus contributing to the desirable universality of the Commission. I wish to pay tribute to the key role played by the Vice-Chairman of IOC, Ms. Marianique Martin-Sané (France) in the successful negotiations to that effect.

In order to refresh my recollection of the overall process of “aggiornamento” of the Commission, I revisited the IOC Manual (1985, 1989) aimed at offering Member States a reference basis with a view of facilitating decisions on their involvement in the Commission’s affairs. At the XIVth Session of the Assembly, chaired by Prof. Ulf Lie, amendments to the Commission’s Statutes were approved, including Art.1, para. 1(a) in which IOC is recognized “as a body with functional autonomy within the framework of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization”. This is a key concept for the objectives and functions of IOC to be fulfilled, that continues to await effective application. It was also proposed that the historical term “Secretary” should be re-designated “Executive

Secretary" so as to better reflect the expectations of Member States regarding functions and a reinforced status of the incumbent vis-à-vis UNESCO and the other ICSPRO agencies, to be performed under the guidance of the IOC's governing bodies and Officers.

Regional approaches acquired particular relevance in the 1980s with a view of fostering cooperation among Member States directly concerned in common ocean regions, particularly for the acquisition of better knowledge, data and information about ecosystems and related monitoring systems in support of development and management. As a result, a network of subsidiary regional bodies (*v.g.* IOCARIBE, WESTPAC, IOCINCWO, IOCEA) was built up, served by IOC Secretariats and Programme Offices provided by Member States and located in their respective areas. These arrangements were complemented by a number of agreements (MoUs) with CPPS, ICES, ICSEM, IHO and other relevant organizations. Looking back, I believe that such a strategy furthered an useful cooperation to the benefit of Member States as well as to the implementation of global programmes.

The joint efforts of IOC and UNEP Seas Programmes reinforced GIPME, MARPOLMON and related TEMA in diverse ocean regions. This brings to mind the relevance of such pioneering steps for the present attempts to maintain a Regular Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment under the joint coordination of IOC and UNEP, in collaboration with other organizations concerned.

It should also be noted the increased attention given by the Commission, in collaboration with other partners, to the promotion of IODE, GLOSS, the use of drifting buoys, satellites and other novel technologies providing as building blocks for IGOOS, that some of us hoped could become a World Ocean Watch complementing the World Weather Watch of WMO, which was later coined as GOOS.

In this context, Professor Inocencio Ronquillo, Chairman of IOC (XIV Assembly, Annex III A) alerted that “uncertainty in resources hampers the Commission’s ability to undertake the obligations facing it – to Member States, to other organizations with which it must and does collaborate, and to the international scientific community. This is a maor challenge that UNESCO and Member States should face”.

I look to this exercise of “institutional archaeology” as a benchmarking for recent developments. The Ministerial Round Table on Ocean Governance held in the framework of the 35th General Conference of UNESCO (2009) offered a panorama of the present state of affairs and pending issues calling for consideration and decision by Member States.

As requested, I now highlight some IOC achievements during the 1980s, emphasizing in particular the following institutional aspects:

- The impact of UNCLOS on the Commission’s Statutes and Programme of Work, even before the entry into force of the Convention, shaped by the concept that “the problems of ocean space are closely interrelated and need to be considered as a whole”.

- The attempts to apply the status of “functional autonomy of IOC” within UNESCO so as to facilitate the Commission to act as a “joint specialized mechanism” of the agencies part of the ICSPRO Agreement supported by a joint secretariat.
- The establishment and activities of IOC regional subsidiary bodies in response to Member States’ objectives and aspirations, as well as the implementation of global programmes with the support of TEMA aimed at strengthening the capacities of developing countries.
- The encouragement to establish NOCs or equivalent bodies by Member States as national focal points for the Commission’s affairs.
- The consolidation of ocean monitoring and observation systems for climate and environmental studies, and tsunami alerts and related data exchange, paving the way for GOOS and the current operational oceanography.

I conclude by saying how my memory of full of gratifying souvenirs of this long navigation side by side with colleagues whose ideas, experiences and friendship I have shared.

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