

Speech General Debate

United Nations Ocean Conference Opening Session

Maandag 27 juni (Lissabon)

Speech (EN)

Dear Excellencies,

Dear Representatives,

Dear friends of the oceans,

I have the honour of speaking to you all today on behalf of the Minister of the North Sea for Belgium. A nation which has only 67 kilometres of shoreline. That is humbling. Especially when compared to the more than 600.000 kilometres of shoreline across the world.

About 0.01 percent. Surely that must be inconsequential in light of the global challenges we are discussing here today? Nothing but a drop in the ocean?

And yet...

And yet that 67 kilometres of shoreline is home to the second largest port in Europe.

And yet that 67 kilometres of shoreline is lined with the sixth largest capacity worldwide of offshore windmills. In absolute numbers, mind you.

And yet that 67 kilometres of shoreline is the first place worldwide where a sniffer airplane actively enforces low nitrogen and sulphur emissions of ships. In one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world.

And yet that 67 kilometres of shoreline contains the largest protected area of Belgium, over 37% of the North Sea has been designated as a marine protected area

As the eyes of the world are upon us, let this serve as a reminder that there is nothing we can't achieve if we set our minds to it.

That it pays to be ambitious.

That we still have the chance to make a difference, to reach our goals.

Like our fellow Blue Leaders, Belgium is convinced that we can turn the tide.

That in these last six months of 2022, we should grab the upcoming opportunities to change the lives of millions of people and protect an important part of the marine environment.

We still have the chance to say to future generations that we did what needed to be done.

But that requires us to take bold and decisive action.

We need to accept a target of 30% of highly and fully protected areas by 2030 within the Convention on Biological Diversity. It's been discussed extensively last week in Nairobi and 30by30 now has firm footing in the draft text.

We also need to finalize the negotiations for the Treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction so marine protected areas on the high seas can be created.

These are ambitious objectives. But I'm convinced it can be done.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Belgium humbly aspires to be an example of what can be achieved by setting ambitious goals.

But surely, it isn't the only one. For that we needn't look any further than the city where we are today.

It is from the city of Lisbon that Portuguese seafarers¹ set sail to find a naval route connecting Europe with Asia.

They didn't listen to the naysayers arguing that it couldn't be done. That they were being too ambitious. And that their goals lay beyond the reach of what could be achieved.

On the contrary. They set their mind to it, set forth from Lisbon and reached their destination. And in doing so, they opened up global trade and fundamentally transformed the world forever.

I implore you to do the same today, here in Lisbon. Let us set ambitious goals and leave here with the steadfast determination to reach those goals.

¹ Da Gama niet bij naam vernoemen. Dat ligt gevoelig bij een aantal landen in Afrika en Azië omwille van zijn wreedheden tegen de lokale bevolking.

Because we too can and must fundamentally transform the world forever.