

Revised PGA statement at opening of 2022 UN Oceans Conference

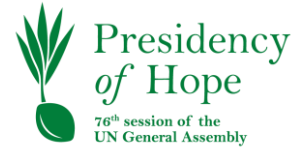
Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to commend our co-hosts, the Governments of Portugal and Kenya, for their unwavering commitment to ocean protection and conservation, and express my gratitude for the opportunity to join you today.

I also thank the City of Lisbon for playing host to the Ocean Conference. It gives me immense pleasure to be here in this beautiful city.

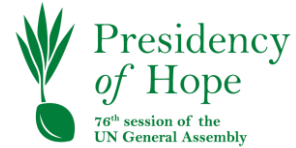
Friends, I will be candid: I am from the Maldives, a small island, big ocean state.



Whether I am here as President of the General Assembly or not, the ocean is in my blood; it runs through my life's narrative, from childhood to parenthood; from my career in the Foreign Service to today.

It is an inescapable reality for me as a person, as a Maldivian, that the ocean is an essential part of life on this planet. I know we cannot exist without it.

I know these words ring true for many of you here today. For the small islanders; for coastal residents; for the workers dependent on tourism and coral reefs; for fisherpersons and for all those, however far they are from the ocean, we turn to the ocean for livelihood, for reprieve, and for enjoyment.

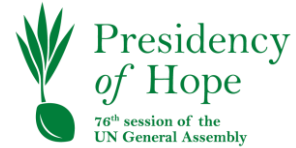


Indeed, beyond those who look to the blue horizon each day, the entirety of humanity relies upon the ocean for half of the oxygen we intake.

This is why we are here this week. To stand for a resource that has carried us, figuratively and literally, through our entire existence.

My friends, the Ocean connects all of us; it connects humanity; connects our planet. There is no context whereby we live on this planet without it.

This Ocean Conference is an opportunity for us to take concrete, demonstrable action to underscore our commitment to save the Ocean. To protect it against the threats, both human-driven and otherwise, that would take it away from us.



Excellencies,

Dear friends,

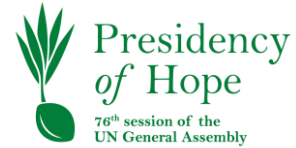
The 2022 UN Ocean Conference comes at a critical and timely opportunity.

On the one hand, the ocean faces a myriad of threats, from climate change to plastic pollution; from over-fishing to acidification.

The impetus to act is clear and resounding.

On the other hand, we have momentum and the wind – or in this case the currents – at our back.

The 40th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea has reiterated our shared responsibility for the ocean.



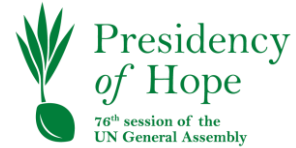
Recent efforts, such as the landmark agreement on ending plastic pollution, and the new World Trade Organization deal on fisheries subsidies, give cause for hope.

And there is optimism towards an international legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

We have a strong foundation to build upon.

Here, in Portugal, the Ocean Conference can set the tone for what needs to be done.

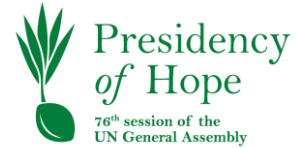
We can help to identify and define key areas of science-driven ocean action, and to outline policies to be implemented by governments to deliver on change.



We can highlight the contributions of female scientists to the study and protection of the ocean and commit to bring a stronger gender perspective to our work.

I met yesterday with a group of women leading on this field and I was impressed and inspired by their work. Female scientists represent on average 38% of researchers in ocean science. While this is 10% higher than science in general, still it is not enough. The Ocean Conference can also strengthen the links between our efforts here, and those on climate change, biodiversity, land degradation and drought.

What is happening in each of these areas has an impact on the ocean and vice versa.



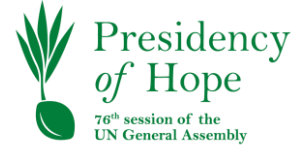
To highlight this connection, I would point to the issue of sargassum, which I had the opportunity to see firsthand on a trip to the Dominican Republic.

Scientists say that global warming, rising water temperatures, and pollutants favor the excessive growth of sargassum.

This in turn affects marine ecosystems, floods beaches, and threatens the economic recovery of countries that rely heavily on tourism.

This complex problem, as well as the many other challenges faced by the oceans, calls for a holistic approach.

On that note, I commend the organizers for their choice of the theme and the focus on science and innovation.



Human ingenuity has delivered us wonders and remarkable advancements.

We see this in medicine, in space, and in the depths of our ocean.

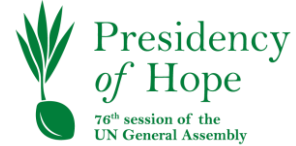
We must lean into this.

There is a future where sustainable ocean tourism drives economies and yet does no harm.

Where renewable energies, including ocean-based systems, reduce carbon emissions and protect vital ecosystems.

Where circular economies thrive, and our production and consumption does not degrade the world around us.

We know that science and ingenuity can deliver.



As I heard yesterday, to ensure we come together to protect the ocean, we should all leave this Conference standing with one hand up and one hand down. One hand up to reach for success, pulling ourselves up and improving in every action we take. The other hand down to pull others along with us.

Let us not fall prey to shortsightedness or lack of ambition.

Let us invest in, trust in, and act upon science.

Let us protect the ocean.

Let us leverage its power; relish its beauty; cherish its diversity; and ensure its health and longevity.

I thank you.