



30th June 2022

Re: Earth Law Center (ELC) written statement for the 2022 UN Ocean Conference (in accordance with A/RES/73/292)

The 2022 United Nations Ocean Conference comes at a critical time. As presented by the theme of the conference, if we save the Ocean, we can protect our future. And as stated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, in order to achieve SDG 14, a change is required in how humans view, manage and use the Ocean. In order to do so, this requires major transformations, common values and shared solutions.

We can no longer work in silos, or address issues in isolation, nor continue to think that the same system that caused our environmental crisis will deliver the transformative and systemic change needed to reverse degradation and restore Ocean health. On the global stage, we speak of "the Ocean we want." Instead of our exclusionary tradition, we urge us all to consider how we may include the Ocean as a stakeholder, how we may listen to the Ocean's voice and provide representation of the Ocean's interests and needs in decision-making. We must rebuild our relationship with the Ocean, and the Earth as a whole, and recognize our responsibilities to act as stewards for the Ocean, and in doing so, for future generations of all life. This will not be easy, but recognizing the Rights of the Ocean may just be what's needed to unite us.

We highlight and support the statement made by Prime Minister of Cabo Verde, Ulisses Correia e Silva, on June 28th at the UN Ocean Conference Plenary, stating "we advocate for standards and binding rules of law that express global commitments and that can ultimately lead to the Universal Declaration of Ocean Rights."

The call to action for a [Universal Declaration of Ocean Rights](#) offers an innovative opportunity for all stakeholders to align under a shared norm and vision. Ocean Rights legally recognizes the Ocean as a living being and our source of life, and creates a responsibility-based framework to respect and protect the Ocean's health and wellbeing (just as many Indigenous and coastal communities have known and practiced). Human rights and well-being are embedded within and dependent on a healthy Ocean and Mother Earth.

Over thirty-five countries are advancing a new framework to protect the Rights of Nature at various levels of local, regional, and national government either constitutionally, through legislation, or through the courts, including in Ecuador, Panama, Mexico, India, Spain, Colombia, Brazil, and the United States, among others.

The international community is calling for transformative change in line with Earth-centered governance and the Rights of Nature. This includes the UN Harmony with Nature Programme,



with over 10 UNGA Resolutions calling for a “holistic and integrated approaches to sustainable development, in its three dimensions, that will guide humanity to live in harmony with nature and lead efforts to restore the health and integrity of the Earth’s ecosystems,” and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, whom passed Resolution 100 in 2012, calling for Nature’s rights to be a “fundamental and absolute key element in all IUCN decisions,” and work towards the creation of a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Nature. Additionally, in 2011, the International Earth System Expert Workshop on Ocean Stresses and Impacts concluded that “[h]uman interactions with the ocean must change with the rapid adoption of a holistic approach to sustainable management of all activities that impinge marine ecosystems. This has to be part of a wider re-evaluation of the core values of human society and its relationship to the world and the resources on which we rely.” These examples are not exhaustive.

By acknowledging the Ocean as our source of life and as a legal entity with needs and interests to be protected, we can move forward with a unified, effective regulatory framework and effectively protect the Ocean and ourselves. We must challenge global norms and systems imposing our separation from the Ocean. This is a defining moment and historical opportunity to restore a relationship of care and stewardship – the very crossroads of ‘business as usual’ or living in harmony with Mother Earth.

We are the Ocean and the Ocean is us. When in doubt, we must favor the Ocean, for she is the lifeblood of our planet.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle Bender".

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rachel Bustamante".

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Callie Veelenturf".

Callie Veelenturf
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