

*Ocean Conference, 9 June 2017 morning plenary session*

*Statement by:*

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Mr. President, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very glad that I can deliver this statement on behalf of the Czech Republic. It is an honour for me to be able to address you on this important occasion of the Ocean Conference. I would like to express gratitude to Fiji and Sweden for convening this conference, to Singapore and Portugal for facilitating intergovernmental consultations on the Call for Action, and also to appreciate the leadership of the President of the General Assembly, which, together, turned this event into such a success.

To start, please allow me to make some rather personal observations. As Czechs, citizens of a landlocked country, we don't have much of physical interaction with the oceans and seas. At least not for most of the year. During the summer, a fever besieges the Czechs who stream in thousands to the nearest holiday spot by the sea. Not unlike other citizens of the world – people love the sea. But let me ask a question: does the sea love us? Difficult question, difficult answer.

I am sure that you have been similarly alarmed as myself by the facts, pictures and stories that have been literally flooding us recently. The oceans and seas suffer immensely. From pollution, impacts of climate change as well as biodiversity loss. From what we have seen, the conclusion and an answer to my question seem simple. People are harming the seas. You wouldn't treat your worst enemy the way we treat our waters. How can we change this and show our appreciation for the giant that covers around 70% of the Earth's surface? The giant that is a source of livelihood for hundreds of millions of people, one that helps us to mitigate climate change?

Firstly, we need to accelerate actions to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, particularly from land-based activities, including marine debris, plastics and micro plastics. We realise that a responsibility for these impacts is shared by all countries, even landlocked countries such as the Czech Republic. We are convinced that all countries need to manage their national systems efficiently, especially in regards to controlling pollution and waste. In this area, in the Czech Republic we have introduced an integrated system of separate collection of plastic waste, which enables common collection of packaging and non-packaging plastic waste originating from households. This system is very efficient, as evidenced by the high percentage of recycled plastic packaging waste.

I already mentioned the essential role oceans play in providing livelihood for hundreds of millions of people around the world. In order to be able to retain the capacity of oceans to do so, we need to focus on marine biodiversity. The impacts of human activities on oceans' biodiversity and therefore also on all ecosystem services that help people around the globe make their living. If we lose this precious basis for economic activity we could be facing situations of thousands of people being driven from their homes.

In this regard, I would like to stress the importance of the legal framework for the protection of the marine environment and oceans biodiversity. The Czech Republic strongly supports and participates on the work of the Preparatory Committee for the Development of the new international legally binding document under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. We hope that this new agreement will help to more integrated approach towards the protection and restoration of the health, productivity and resilience of the ocean and the marine environment as a whole.

Of course, we will not achieve any of this if we don't engage the people. And this is maybe the most daunting task ahead of us: make everyone act as if the ocean was a friend in need. A friend whose illness can be cured only by collective action by all of us.

Thank you for your attention.