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The Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations

**Report to Plenary from
H.E. Thorgerdur Katrín Gunnarsdóttir,
Minister for Fisheries and Agriculture**

Co-chair of Partnership Dialogue 6

**High-level United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of
Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans,
seas and marine resources for sustainable development**

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Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Our partnership dialogue addressed “Increasing scientific knowledge, and developing research capacity and transfer of marine technology.” We had a fruitful discussion focused on specific challenges and concrete solutions. Many of them are already working, and can be scaled up. We also heard ideas of new solutions on the horizon. The co-chairs were myself and H.E. Mr. Héctor Soldi Soldi, Vice Minister for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Peru.

Our excellent moderator, Mr. Johan Kuylenstierna, Executive Director of the Stockholm Environment Institute, guided the dialogue among our panelists, Prof. Patricia Miloslavich, Professor of Simon Bolivar University, Venezuela and University of Tasmania, Australia; Dr. Mark Abbott, Director and President, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution; Dr. Vladimir Ryabinin, Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO and Assistant Director General of UNESCO; and Dr. Amos Barkai, Co-owner and CEO of OLSPS, South Africa.

Our panel highlighted the importance of the science-policy interface. It was clear that we must bridge the gap between scientists and decision makers. We must overcome the “language barrier” between these groups and foster a culture of listening and of sharing research. We also have to reach out to the social sciences and other disciplines. And of course, the engagement of local communities and civil society is crucial at all stages of policy making.

Scientists’ and policy makers’ viewpoints and priorities can complement and reinforce one another—if the communication channels are open. In some cases this is as simple as including abstracts or summaries for policy makers, as the IPCC does. In other cases we need to engage the press and others. Communication between scientists and policy makers is essential and should be a two way street where policy makers ask for scientific assessment and scientists look into policy needs.

Mr. President,

The panel—including myself and my fellow co-chair—stressed the fundamental importance of data. We agreed that it is critical to make marine data open and accessible to all. We must build up data capacity in all regions in the developing and developed world and create mechanisms to ensure coherence and comparability of data across and between regions. So much of the ocean is still unknown, and the panel and speakers raised the importance of mapping the ocean floor, of taking biodiversity surveys, and of ensuring effective ocean observation especially of key ocean variables.

In some cases this kind of data collection will require expensive capacity development, and partners in government, academia and the private sector must stand ready to provide that kind of support. But in some cases, the capacity is there—in the smart phones so many of us around the world hold in our hands. It was further noted that in fisheries science, assessment methods have been developed in recent years for data limited situations.

The private sector, shipping, fishing, energy and other sectors, also have untapped partnership potential—sharing the data that they collect as part of their daily activities.

As technology advances at a rapid pace—often thanks to the innovation of youth and of entrepreneurs—we need to make these innovations accessible to a wide range of people. This means being affordable in the local and national context. As one of our panelists said, in countries where senior professors are paid 50 dollars a month, a 200-dollar technology is beyond reach.

The benefits of sharing data will be great, including economic benefits. We can, for instance, pursue a “blue economy” with data-rich, sustainable fisheries operations that co-exist with marine protection and the preservation of cultural heritage. The fisheries industry is complex, and technology can help fishers be more efficient at all levels. This ranges from large commercial companies using electronic log books to artisanal fisheries using smart phones to secure the latest market information.

Mr. President,

Speakers made commitments for instance to address overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing as well as measures to strengthen regional cooperation, and build capacity in developing countries— SIDS and LDCs in particular. Governments from North and South alike are committed to supporting research institutes and observatories looking at the deep sea, coastal waters, the polar region, tropical ecosystems, marine biodiversity, climate change impacts, weather patterns and trends, and many other areas. They are also advancing efforts on many other issues including sustainable consumption and production—decreasing the use of plastic, for instance—and protection of critical ecosystems like the mangroves.

Government and other partners also discussed their commitment to the transfer of marine technology for a range of issues. These include challenges like underwater noise, micro plastic and the impact of land-based agriculture on coastal ecosystems and fisheries. Technology transfer will also advance opportunities around bio-technology, ecosystem services and aquaculture.

Speakers also discussed commitments advancing the engagement of essential stakeholders in marine stewardship. These include indigenous people; young people through an “Ocean Ambassadors” program in the Pacific; and micro, small and medium fisheries enterprises in developing countries. Empowering these groups will have benefits for the future health of the ocean.

Ocean education and literacy is critically important, and many organizations are advancing this through knowledge and innovation hubs and institutes. In addition, several Member States and others voiced strong support for the International Decade on Ocean Science for Sustainable Development to continue building ocean literacy.

Mr. President,

The wide-ranging and positive discussion in Partnership Dialogue 6 left me and my fellow co-chair with a sense of optimism. It is clear that we have extensive know-how which we can build on for our common good. It also demonstrated a high level of commitment from various stakeholders, in particular the scientific community, when it comes to this vital underpinning of successful implementation of SDG14.

I hope our dream of progress and commitment in the area of science and technology will be realized by 2030. But politicians also have a major responsibility. The challenge and responsibility for them is to have the strength to follow scientific advice, even when it is unwelcome. Science should provide the basis for responsible policy making. We politicians must look to the long-term interests of society and the environment – and stand against short term, narrow interests.