

## A Rocha International Statement to the United Nations for The Ocean Conference

A Rocha is a family of Christian conservation organisations joined by a common ethos and commitments to sustainable development. We operate at the interface between science, policy, community engagement and theology. This engagement with beliefs and faith enhances conservation practices, leading to conservation advances. For example, A Rocha UK established the UK's eco-church project to which 600 churches now participate.

As Christians, those who are trying to follow Christ, we can summarise our faith commitment to the ocean and coastal communities as fulfilling Jesus' summary of the life of His followers: loving God and loving your neighbour. God made the ocean and called it good and gave to humans the responsibility to care for it. This we do out of love for God.

Our actions are one moment in a chain of blessing or a chain of destruction. What we buy, how we deal with plastic, all actions have impacts on others for good or for bad. We are either loving our neighbour, both our fellow humans and all life on our planet or walking on the other side of the road as the first two travellers did in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan.

In addition to a commitment out of our faith, we are committed to generating and utilising science to guide our activities. We spent three years studying the biodiversity of Watamu Marine National Park on the shores of our field study centre in Kenya. We identified 20 IUCN Red Listed species and for the first time developed a marine habitat map. Our work in the community and with environmental education gave us experience and data on the needs of the local community.

In France and Portugal our focus has been on the issue of microplastic pollution. Integrating our protocols with European standards while pioneering a citizen science approach methodologically.

By utilising this approach of combining theological reflection and scientific data we identified several education, advocacy and conservation projects which meet multiple SDGs – working towards the transformation of both people and place.

At the recent IUCN World Conservation Congress, A Rocha as an official member participated in many aspects of that important meeting. It was clear how significant the ocean was and in particular its importance culturally and spiritually. The majority of the world adheres to one of the world's major religions. The language of science and faith are different, but can be complementary in the service of conservation. Partnership must include faith communities.

We will continue to expand our marine programme and are committed to utilising the sustainable development goals as a guide to help us reflect on how well in particular we are loving our neighbours, both our fellow humans and all life on our planet. A Rocha is faith-based, but not faith-biased. We look forward to partnering with others, serving coastal communities whatever their faith background and doing our small part to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This gives us hope for the ocean.