Ramsar Convention on Wetlands at the UN Ocean Conference

26 June 2017

The first UN Conference on Oceans was organized to galvanize global support for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) which aims to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The set up around which the Conference was organized included plenary meetings, 7 Partnership Dialogues each focusing on an area important for the health of the ocean and numerous side events. Ramsar Convention Secretary General, Martha Rojas-Urrego, was invited to moderate the Partnership Dialogue 2 focused on solutions to manage, protect, preserve and conserve marine and coastal ecosystems.

The Secretary General was also a panellist at two side events organized by UN-Water and IUCN respectively. She also participated in a press conference on the Partnership Dialogue and delivered a statement to the plenary of the Ocean’s Conference in the UN General Assembly Hall emphasising the important role of the Convention to help achieve SDG14 on oceans. Parties to the Convention have designated about 946 sites that contain coastal or marine elements as Wetlands of International Importance. Furthermore inland fresh water ecosystems such as rivers and lakes connect our lands to our coasts transporting nutrients, sediments and are therefore important for the health of our oceans. In this regard presence and participation at this Conference was crucial to position the Convention as an important platform and partner for the implementation of SDG14.

List of events in which Ramsar Secretary General, Martha Rojas-Urrego made interventions:

- Moderator for the Partnership Dialogue 2 on Managing, Protecting, and Conserving Marine and Coastal ecosystem held Tuesday 6 June 2017. The dialogue was co-chaired by H.E. Mr. Tommy Remengesau, President of Palau and H.E. Ms. Silvia Velo, Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea, Italy. Panellists included the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity and other representatives from other national to global organizations. The list of interventions from the floor was the longest of all Dialogues and included Heads of State and Ministers as well as other stakeholders. Photos by IISD and summary by Earth Negotiation Bulletin of the Partnership Dialogue 2

- Press Conference on outcomes of the Partnership Dialogue 2 held on Wednesday 7 June 2017 at the UN Media centre, jointly with Erik Solheim, Executive Director of UN Environment and Petteri
Taalas, Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organization. (View on UN Web TV and YouTube)

- Panellist Side Event, held on Wednesday 7 June 2017 - Joining Hands to Help Achieve SDGs 6 and 14 - a Win-Win for Freshwater and Oceans organized by UN-Water, UN-Oceans and the Action Platform on Source-to-Sea Management (S2S Platform)
- Panellist Side Event, held on Wednesday 7 June 2017- From problems to solutions: Stewarding our oceans between major climate change impacts and nature based solutions to adaptation and mitigation organized by IUCN marine programme, France and Sweden
- Statement to the Plenary of the Ocean Conference delivered in the UN General Assembly Hall, Friday 9 June 2017 (see video from 2:00:59)
- Statement On World Oceans Day by SG published on Website and shared on social media platforms

Results and outcomes:

Over 1,328 voluntary commitments were made by governments, civil society, academia etc. to support the implementation of SDG14 such as by designating more Marine Protected Areas, efforts to protect and restore degraded marine and coastal ecosystems (France in particular committed to protecting 50% of mangroves and 75% of coral reefs by 2021)

The outcomes from Partnership Dialogue 2 moderated by the Secretary General were presented in a report delivered to the plenary on 9 June by the President of Palau, who was co-chair at the dialogue. (see video at 34.00)

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Partnership Dialogue 2 also received the following media outreach

- IISD daily coverage of highlights (see 6 June)
- Earth Negotiations Bulletin of the Conference
- Article in the Foreign Affairs Publisher
- Daily Meeting coverage published by the United Nations

Source to sea management is recognized as crucial for the implementation of SDG14 and improving the health of the
ocean. At a side event organized in this regard by UN-Water and UN-Oceans, the role of the Convention as a custodian of fresh, marine and coastal ecosystems was highlighted. The event was covered in the IISD side events daily coverage (see 7 June)

Finally the Convention and the Secretary General’s intervention in the Partnership Dialogue and address to the plenary of the Conference are highlighted in the UN Report on the Conference. The Summary Report of the Conference published by IISD also highlights the Convention and mentions the contribution of wetlands to achieving multiple SDGs and announces the release in 2018 of the Global Wetlands Outlook Report.

Conclusions:

The First UN Ocean Conference was attended by approximately 4,000 delegates, including 16 Heads of State and numerous ministers, ambassadors as well representatives from the UN system, other intergovernmental organizations civil society, academic institutions, indigenous peoples and the private sector.

Ramsar Convention presence at the Conference and participation at key notable events was important to increase visibility and position of the Convention as a relevant platform for the SDG agenda. It was evident when reviewing the preparatory papers produced prior to the Conference, that the Convention as a platform for the implementation of SDG14 is not obvious. The Convention was not mentioned in the preparatory documents, even when other instruments and agreements were listed, and when marine and coastal fresh water ecosystems are central to the implementation of SDG 14.

It is therefore a positive outcome that the Convention is mentioned in the Reports of the Conference and featured in IISD’s daily reports and Earth Negotiations Bulletin, a renowned environment conference reporting services with far reaching distribution beyond the Conference walls. The meeting was an opportunity to give visibility to the Convention among participants, especially given the considerable participation from high level representatives. We need to continue this form of engagement, as well as encourage our contracting parties to highlight the role of the Convention for the implementation of the SDG agenda.

Examples of opportunities where the Convention can contribute to implement SDG14 that were highlighted include:

- designation of coastal and marine ecosystems as Ramsar Sites and make the linkages to the SDG global
objective and target to increase Marine Protected Areas;

- sharing knowledge and promoting examples of Ramsar site management plans, transboundary management of sites and integrated water management plans which contribute to various SDGs;
- promote the Global Wetlands Outlook to be launched in 2018 as essential to monitor the progress on the state of marine and coastal ecosystems as a contribution to SDG monitoring;
- contribution to link fresh water and marine/oceans thus providing a platform for SDG 6 and 14; and
- participating in the blue economy for climate change mitigation.