

Welcome Address by HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco

15th Edition of the Monaco Blue Initiative

18 March 2024 – Oceanographic Museum of Monaco

Mesdames et Messieurs les Ministres, Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs, chers amis,

Nous voilà donc, chers amis, réunis, pour la quinzième édition de cette Monaco Blue Initiative (MBI) dont la première session s'est tenue ici même en 2010, à l'occasion du centenaire de cette noble maison, certains d'entre vous s'en souviennent sans doute encore.

L'idée de la MBI était venue quelques mois plus tôt, lors de la 15^e conférence des parties à la Convention Cadre des Nations Unies sur les changements climatiques, qui s'est tenue à Copenhague, à la fin de l'année 2009.

Face à la difficulté d'avancer de manière globale, face à la nécessité de mieux prendre en compte les problématiques des mers et des océans dans les négociations internationales sur l'environnement, et face à l'urgence de prendre des initiatives concrètes en faveur de ces espaces marins, j'avais ressenti le besoin de réfléchir collectivement à de nouveaux outils.

Des outils pour penser, pour collaborer, pour agir. Tel était donc l'objet de ce *think tank* informel, qui depuis lors, se réunit chaque année autour des grands enjeux qui déterminent l'avenir de nos mers et de nos océans.

Distinguished Ministers, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear friends,

Bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds to create common solutions together, addressing environmental issues without separating them from the human development needs, thinking about our immediate future while bearing in mind the long and very long-term prospects... Those ambitions, which guided us in 2010, are still relevant, I think, today.

I believe that over the past few months and the past few years, they have assumed an even greater importance.

Because in fifteen years, our intuition has been confirmed, our determination strengthened, and the battle for seas and ocean protection has not only changed in scale, it has also changed in nature.

There used to be just a few enthusiasts who advocated for the sea, a few *ad hoc* initiatives to protect exceptional ecosystems and endangered species.

Now there is a global movement.

And there is growing awareness of the fact that the Ocean is not just another piece of the puzzle for our future, but that it holds within it, most of the keys that will determine this future, from the climate to biodiversity, from food to health, from peace to the economy.

These changes have materialized through several key moments over the past fifteen years, moments of which we should be proud.

I am thinking of the Ocean being included in the climate negotiations, an achievement made at COP21 in Paris.

I am thinking of the breakthrough in 2019 which was the release, in this very same spot, in this very same room, of the IPCC's Special Report on the Ocean and the Cryosphere.

I am thinking of the development, all over the world, of an increasingly dynamic and increasingly promising blue economy.

I am thinking of the promise of blue finance, for which my Foundation, together with others, has initiated projects, and which I believe we will be discussing later.

I am thinking of the increasing number of Marine Protected Areas, in which my country is involved and for which we take action, including in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

And of course, I am thinking of the multilateral progress made over the past few months: the agreement on High Seas biodiversity, or BBNJ, adopted at the UN after close to two decades of work.

Or the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework and its "30x30" objective, adopted under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Of course, this progress has not yet been enough to reverse the trend of degradation – and sometimes even destruction – of our Ocean which prompted the creation of the Monaco Blue Initiative.

On the contrary, for fifteen years these disturbing trends have continued, year after year, and the findings of scientists are still extremely alarming.

However, we are no longer powerless in the face of this sad and dramatic news.

We have the knowledge gained from our experience, new tools, and even greater resources.

It is this knowledge, these tools and these resources we will be talking about today.

We will be doing so when examining the prospects offered by the blue economy, and through it, the role of the private sector in Ocean protection.

We will be doing so when discussing the protection of the Mediterranean Sea and the achievement of the « 30x30 » target.

We will be doing so when looking at the more specific challenges of a future Treaty to combat plastic and the strict regulations of deep-sea mineral exploration.

Through these various topics, we will aim to prepare for the major events ahead, because there are many, and they will provide us with the opportunity to make concrete progress.

Next April, we will be in Barcelona for the Conference organized by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the UNESCO, within the framework of the Decade of Ocean Science.

The following week, we will be meeting in Athens, Greece, for a new edition of *Our Ocean Conference*, where most of these issues will also be discussed. Thank you for this invitation.

Most importantly, we need to prepare for the next key event taking place next spring, which is the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC), which will be held just a few kilometers away in Nice.

It will be preceded by several preparatory stages, such as the Blue Economy and Finance Forum which we are organizing here, in the Principality, the day before UNOC.

Because my Government and Monaco's relevant institutions, will be attending all of these events.

We will be in Barcelona where Monaco Explorations' new Mediterranean mission will be launched.

We will be in Athens where several Monegasque entities will be signing agreements to support MPAs, with Greece's Natural Environment & Climate Change Agency. Thank you very much for that.

All these events will offer us the opportunities to make the voice of the Ocean heard, to reiterate the need to give it greater consideration, and to confirm the urgency to take action.

Because this is the imperative today that brings us here together, as it has for the last fifteen years: to pool our knowledge, our experience, our resources, our energy, our associations, our institutions, our businesses, in clear support of the Ocean and the sea, including the Mediterranean Sea which you saw as you arrived, and which we know so badly needs our help.

About the Mediterranean, I would like to remind that, in November 2024, we will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Pelagos Agreement.

This agreement was a forerunner to the creation of a subregion, a marine sanctuary in a particularly dense and particularly precious area.

More than any other, the Mediterranean needs such initiatives, initiatives capable of reconciling nature's imperatives with the requirements of our society.

With strengths and expertise on which we can build, but also with shortcomings and blind spots, which we need to address as urgently as possible.

Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs, chers amis,

C'est bien le sens de cette Monaco Blue Initiative et c'est bien le sens de la Monaco Ocean Week dans laquelle elle s'inscrit.

J'espère d'ailleurs que vous pourrez profiter de cette semaine consacrée aux océans et à leur protection, car elle propose un programme aussi dense que varié, dans lequel chacun de vous devra trouver des sources d'intérêt.

Avant de vous céder la parole, je voudrais donc simplement vous remercier tous et toutes de votre présence et de votre participation à cette quinzième édition de la Monaco Blue Initiative.

Je vous remercie, et je vous souhaite d'excellents débats et une très belle journée. Merci beaucoup.