

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

First of all please allow me to thank the Indonesian authorities in charge of this edition of “Our Ocean Conference” for its organisation and to thank you all for taking part in it.

Since 2014, this initiative, launched by John Kerry, has fostered dialogue regarding the seas, promoted discussions between decision-makers from diverse backgrounds, and developed concrete solutions in order to create collectively a new relationship between humanity and the sea.

Each year, this event gains momentum. In Malta last year, we were able to gauge its extraordinary effectiveness.

With 433 tangible and measurable commitments, of which 100 concern business, representing a total of 7.2 billion Euros, plus the creation of 2.5 million square kilometres of marine protected areas, the Maltese Conference has shown that it is today possible to accelerate our commitments and achievements.

This fifth conference will, I hope, provide a new opportunity for doing so. In any case, it seems that all the elements have been brought together for this – especially because we have been brought together!

For a year, and despite the commitments I have just mentioned, things have not really improved regarding the climate. On the contrary, the situation is even of greater concern than it was at our last meeting.

As you have undoubtedly noticed, the last few months have been among the most disturbing we have ever experienced. Deadly fires have ravaged California and Greece; floods have killed hundreds of people in Japan and India; unprecedented heat waves have struck Canada and Scandinavia; the hottest temperatures ever have been recorded in Oman, Baku, Scotland and Algeria.

All these events, only foretastes of even greater catastrophes that await us in the future, given that the major greenhouse-gas-emitting countries are almost all reneging on the commitments made in the Paris Agreement, if they have not quite simply and regrettably left it altogether.

Given the accumulation of these events, and in light of these perspectives, is it not too late?

While our climate system appears well and truly disrupted, while the thresholds below which we hoped to keep global warming appear to be slipping out of reach, and while humanity is continuing its mad race, burning increasing amounts of fossil fuels, is there still time for hope? Is there still time to take action?

Well, today we could provide two responses to these questions. A principled response and a specific response.

The principled response is that, we can limit these dramas .

Of course, it is too late to bring back our climate at pre-industrial levels. But it is not too late to avoid everything spiralling out of control. Even if we only have a choice between a 1.5 or 2°C ,or a 5°C rise in temperature, this choice is of vital importance.

This choice exists. To address it, we have a valuable ally. An ally who brings us together here today, and who is at the heart of the specific response to the question about whether it is already too late or not. This ally is the ocean.

The ocean is of course the victim of global warming and its consequences. Rising water levels, acidification, destruction of ecosystems: we are all too familiar with these phenomena, which join the long list of types of damage we are inflicting to our seas.

However, it is more vital than ever that we improve the ways we protect our oceans, as they play an important role in the fight against climate change. To date, they have in fact absorbed 90% of the heat that humans have added to the climate system. They take up over one quarter of the CO₂ we release into the atmosphere. Without them, this planet would have reached temperatures that would have already rendered it uninhabitable .

However, these essential services provided by the oceans are increasingly threatened by their degradation.

This is the reason why the fight against global warming involves doing more to protect our oceans.

I am thinking for example about marine protected areas, which favour the development of species capable of storing carbon and revitalising the ecosystems, which helps regulate the climate.

I am thinking about the protection of threatened ecosystems such as mangroves or Coral Reef, which play a crucial role in protecting the biodiversity of our seas, and thus their capacity to buffer climate change, to mitigate also the effects of global warming–cyclones in particular.

I am also thinking about the many resources provided by the oceans, starting with marine renewable energies, which may tomorrow make a decisive contribution to the energy transition we need to achieve.

This is the reason why the oceans are not only a victim of global warming. They must be a valuable ally for us.

They must be the starting point for new balances that we have to build for our world. Once again, as the French historian Jules Michelet wrote, “it is by the sea that we commence all true understanding of Geography”.

To start to write a new geography for a world fighting efficiently against global warming: this is the challenge facing this meeting, and this is one of the major challenges we all face in this century.

Thank you very much.