

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

The issue of plastic pollution in the oceans is a collective responsibility.

Our first responsibility is to halt telluric pollution which is the main source of accumulated plastic in our seas. There are a number of levers to help us achieve this.

The first involves encouraging recycling policies, developing a more circular economy, promoting waste sorting and producing less waste in the first place. These are all approaches that are familiar and we know how effective they can be.

This is why we are adopting important measures in this area in Monaco. Starting from next year, the distribution of single-use plastic bags will be prohibited in Monaco.

By 2019 at the latest, food products such as fruits, vegetables and confectionery will have to be packaged in bags made from recycled paper or paper from sustainably managed forests, replacing plastic packaging.

And, from 1 January 2020, disposable plastic kitchen utensils will be banned unless they are made from at least 40% vegetable-based materials.

We must hope that these kinds of decisions will also be adopted more widely. In particular, it is important to promote such policies in developing countries. International aid and bilateral initiatives must help with this necessary transition.

National policies, throughout the world, must be strengthened – this is the second lever – by more appropriate international regulation.

This is one of the challenges to which we will return often during the course of this Conference: the need to improve the management of the seas and to do so, based on collective principles, within the framework of the United Nations.

Equally, at a more local level, initiatives must be supported, in particular marine protected areas, which we must develop. These sustainable management solutions today offer effective tools for preserving certain areas.

Finally, as always, we must increase our scientific understanding of the issue, without which we will not be able to correctly comprehend a threat that the eye does not see, and that, as land-dwellers, we can sometimes neglect.

This is why the Principality of Monaco and My Foundation have opted to host and support a number of scientific initiatives to improve knowledge on preservation of the seas.

I would like to make special mention of the Tara expedition. My Foundation is delighted to be a partner to this expedition, which last year carried out an important mission to collect and analyze plastics in the Mediterranean.

I would also like to highlight the Monaco Blue Initiative, the think tank which I established in 2010 to bring together, on an annual basis, political decision-makers, environmental protection advocates, economic stakeholders, and scientists for an open and rational dialogue on the main challenges facing the seas and their future. Together, we are trying to identify ways to promote responsible management of our shared heritage.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize what, for me, is the only definitive solution to the plastic problem: the development of technological solutions capable of offering alternatives to this material.

This is an industrial challenge, requiring the cooperation of scientists, businesses and governments. More broadly, this is also about developing a low-carbon economy.

I am aware that it will be a long and difficult task but solutions already exist, for example biodegradable organic materials, which are increasingly offering a credible alternative.

Naturally, there is an immediate economic cost, but the long-term environmental cost of these materials is small compared with that of oil.

By developing them, not only will we be combating plastic pollution in our seas, we will also be contributing to the fight against global warming which through carbon emissions is harming them and causing acidification.

We will prevent oil slicks. We will put an end to huge amounts of land-based pollution. And we will, I am certain, resolve a number of crises which are currently tearing our world apart.

Thank you.