2020 UN Ocean Conference – 4th June 2020
"A digital ocean: data and science session"
Proposed introductory address for HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I am of course sorry that we are not able to meet today to interact in person, as was previously planned. This United Nations conference was an extremely important meeting for all of us.

However, this series of virtual meetings organised by the World Economic Forum and Friends of the Ocean Action is testimony to the fact that we have been able to change our habits and shoulder responsibility to address a common threat.

The session that brings us together invites us to reflect on the prospects of ocean sciences and the potential of a more effective use of the every-growing data we have at hand.

I am not a scientist and therefore will not touch on the technical considerations concerning these matters. But I would like to elaborate on some of the issues we might discuss.

As far as I see it, there are three key areas.

First of all, there is the need to produce data, the requirement to have accurate information enabling us to gain a better understanding of the oceans and the ways of protecting them.

In this respect, I believe that an opportunity is being presented to us which we need to seize: the "United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development". And I would very much like to pay tribute to Vladimir Rabynin who is with us this afternoon .

This Decade offers us a fantastic opportunity to give this science the prominence it deserves, and more importantly the resources necessary to deploy it.

This will of course entail the mobilisation of public resources, but also other resources, whether this be corporate commitment or citizen responsibility.

It will certainly also entail the strengthening of multi-disciplinary approaches, through the development of means to explore and observe the ocean, and the need to incorporate environmental and socio-economic dimensions into this science.

And it will entail the exploration of innovative technology, which will open up new opportunities for cooperation.

I am thinking of satellite surveillance systems for example, particularly suited to issues as extensive as those concerning the oceans.

Monaco for instance supports observation and monitoring missions to keep track of marine mammals using satellite-guided Sphyrna drones: this is one of the many solutions we need to promote.

The second issue is of course data ownership and sharing, which is one of the key factors to make faster progress as far as our knowledge is concerned, for the benefit of all.

There is of course a premise: the general interest to humankind. This has always been an essential value of science. One hundred years ago, my great great grandfather, Prince Albert I, already made this a strong focus of his work. And I know that many scientists share this vision for open science. From this point of view, there must be strong multilateral commitment within the context of the Decade.

However, the question of data sharing goes beyond general interest: it also promotes the development of private initiatives using new technologies to contribute to a more responsible and more sustainable use of marine resources.

We need to work with private players and to help them, insofar as they share our sustainable development goals.

This brings me to the third issue which is, more broadly, the blue economy on which our efforts should be focused.

Humanity, now more than ever, is seeking new resources to satisfy its demands for energy, food, and raw materials. In order to do so, it is turning to the sea and its huge potential.

Faced with this outlook, it is now important to do everything we can to reconcile human needs with ocean imperatives. And it is therefore essential to promote any initiative that is likely to help us reach this goal.

This will require the mobilisation of economic players, making them see the potential of the blue economy and supporting them, over and above the sharing of data; it will mean providing maximum support to ocean-friendly projects that take into account the needs and natural balance of the oceans.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the importance of science in collective decision-making.

If we want to protect the oceans effectively, we need to ensure that our actions are guided increasingly more often by the knowledge and warnings provided by the scientific community.

Faced with the coronavirus, we saw the whole world submitting to the injunctions of medical science and the majority of governments engaging independent scientific organisations. Today, how many countries are making the effort to let scientific recommendations guide their maritime policy?

Interconnecting the decisions of political and economic players more effectively with the work of the scientific community should more than ever before be at the heart of our strategies, because the connection between science, decision makers and public opinion has always been the principle of any responsible action.

This is what, I believe, motivated my great-great-grandfather Prince Albert I, who 99 years ago, when addressing the Washington Academy of Sciences, urged everyone to listen more carefully to "the words of our scientists, who are keen to lead the world towards greater civilisation".

This is our goal and our duty: to bring about progress, with the oceans, by science.

Thank you.