

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Throughout the first decade of the Monaco Blue Initiative's existence, we cultivated some good habits and we honestly thought that they would last a long time...

With the coronavirus crisis, we now need to change most of our habits. We must forgo the enjoyment of meeting physically, political and economic leaders, scientific and environmental players, to discuss issues we hold close to our hearts.

This new setup not only changes the nature of our discussions, with dialogue via interposed screens: it also modifies their content.

I think it is safe to say that our discussions and ideas will, for a long time, be greatly marked by the crisis we are currently experiencing. How could it be otherwise?

In just a few weeks, we have seen our world change. We have also seen our oceans change. We have seen our minds change.

And this change, however long it lasts, brings about one certainty at least: our world is not sacrosanct. We are even more vulnerable than we thought. And we are collectively capable of change, including extremely rapid change.

Consequently, I hope that this rather special edition of the Monaco Blue Initiative will take place under the banner of change. Change in how we work, of course. But more importantly a change in our attitude with regard to the marine environment and marine resources.

In this respect, I would like to broach a few important points which are on the agenda of our meeting.

Firstly, in regard to marine protected areas, it is a case of considering them from a two-fold point of view.

An international point of view, which means their development and reinforcement, both in number and in nature, and this needs to be discussed in multilateral forums.

And a more local point of view: the way they are managed where improvements should be made and the need for greater involvement of the coastal populations concerned.

Underlying these considerations is a very real need to develop marine protected areas much more efficiently than we have done so far.

I would like to remind you that ten years ago the international community pledged to place 10% of marine areas under protected status. Everyone agrees that we have not yet reached this target, while many consider even – and I share this opinion – that our target today should be 30% for the next decade.

And there are very real economic opportunities offered by marine protected areas. As we know, this economic dimension is crucial to their success. And it justifies that the appropriate funds be allocated to them.

In this context, I am delighted that Medfund, the trust fund we created with France and Tunisia, to develop marine protected areas in the Mediterranean, continues to grow.

Only recently we committed to funding amounting to 1.8 million Euros for the benefit of marine protected areas in Tunisia and Albania over the next 5 years. These funds will be allocated to local civil society organisations and national agencies in charge of protected areas. It will, I hope, give them the resources they need to ensure sustainable effective management practices.

The question we should also be asking is the efficiency of marine protected areas.

You know as well as I do how protection measures differ from one place to another. In order for our action to have an effect, we need to guarantee the actual level of these measures. And we need to adapt our conservation tools to the various ecosystems and threats they face more effectively, and to ensure better coordination between them.

I therefore hope that our discussions, will help us to identify operational perspectives in this respect.

The second point we will be discussing this afternoon concerns more generally the implementation of a genuine blue economy, to reconcile the needs of humankind with those of the ocean.

To address these often conflicting challenges, I believe that the value of our work, once again, will come from our ability to look at things as practically as possible, basing ourselves on experiences and observations, not being afraid to speak of failures and weaknesses, as well as success stories.

“To know men, one must see them act” Rousseau wrote. This applies to our subjects as it does to others: to truly be aware of our relationship with the ocean and to hope to change it, we need to see how we act vis-à-vis the seas.

This is the whole point of this Monaco Blue Initiative. Engage all the players involved in dialogue, so that we can gain a better understanding of the issues that link the seas and humanity. And so that we are also able to assess the actions we have undertaken and those we need to initiate more effectively.

This is how we will be able to place the oceans at the heart of our development paradigm.

At a time when coronavirus and its effects prompt us to rethink our world and compel us to change our priorities, I believe that these issues are still relevant today.

I am therefore delighted that this Monaco Blue Initiative is being held, despite the constraints.

And I would like to extend special thanks to you for agreeing to join us.

Thank you very much.