

*HSH Prince Albert II invited to the Parliament of Palau - March 2013  
Address by H.S.H. the Prince*

Presidents,

Senators,

Delegates,

...

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

For years I have heard praise about the Republic of Palau for its environmental policy, natural treasures and welcome, and for years I have wanted to take the time to come here myself to discover your countryside of course, but above all to get to know the people that keep it alive, develop and preserve it.

I have therefore come to Palau today as a brother from the other side of the world, following the visit of a Palau Delegation I had the pleasure of welcoming to Monaco last year.

I come as a representative of a small maritime State, whose future is allied to that of the seas and is consequently inextricably linked to yours.

I come as a player determined to protect the environment, who devotes a significant amount of his energy to defending our common heritage.

I come as a lover of nature and the sea, one who is pleased to discover your treasures and intent on doing everything I can, as you do, to protect them.

I come also as a brother that neither the geographical distance, cultural differences, nor even any kind of interest will ever be able to distract from all that unites us.

What unites us is our joint awareness of the greater interest. The greater interest of a planet whose preservation is now uncertain. The overriding interest of oceans more than ever preyed upon by multiple threats of which you and I are both aware: pollution, overfishing, the irresponsible exploitation of certain offshore mineral resources, especially oil, the weakening of the most vulnerable areas such as the coral reefs, the loss of biodiversity, and global warming and its implications, including ocean acidification on which the Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC) is carrying out crucial work...

This work in which the Principality is also intensely engaged.

Faced with such dangers, we share, I know, the same desire for action. And we are pursuing parallel paths, confronted with the same issues, the same difficulties.

For the Republic of Palau, and the Principality of Monaco, the challenge is to act in the face of a global issue, despite our scope of action being geographically limited. This equation, which takes on particular importance for our small States, in reality poses the same problem for all countries, whatever their size, that are keen to implement action for the environment.

Because the dangers that we are fighting know no frontiers. They are the result of global mechanisms that nobody alone can overcome.

The only way to protect our planet, in an efficient and global manner, is to do it together.

For this, the United Nations remain the framework of reference. That is why for over twenty years I have taken part in all UN summits devoted to the environment, in which also the Republic of Palau is particularly active. And that is why we need to develop multilateral tools devoted to the sea, which are presently insufficient in the face of new challenges.

The main one is the Montego Bay Convention. The Principality of Monaco, which was one of the first States to sign this Convention, has been able to assess for the past thirty years the many preservation measures this Convention allows for. The definition of the continental shelf and exclusive economic zones, together with the institution of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, represent considerable progress enabling us to address some of the issues encountered by the seas.

But we realise that this text is insufficient in a number of areas, such as the issue of an extended continental shelf, which is currently at the heart of a great deal of questioning, as it determines the ability of States to appropriate offshore resources. More generally, the status of the high seas and the ocean floor is inadequately defined in this Convention.

It is not for lack of trying to mobilise international authorities on this issue. However, the emergence of an international decision is unfortunately not an easy task.

We can all remember the disappointment that has accompanied the majority of the most recent international meetings concerning environmental protection and above all climate change. The current crisis situation, which is pushing each State to focus first and foremost on defending its immediate interests, cannot, I think, be resolved in the short term. Even if the global economic situation radically improves, which I hope happens of course, it is unlikely that many sovereign States will agree to giving up certain privileges for the sake of the best interests of future generations.

That is why, rather than chasing after a universal agreement, and initiating a long series of negotiations around the Montego Bay Convention, I believe it is more relevant to look for ways of making good use, on an ad hoc basis, of the tools we have at hand.

I am thinking of course of marine protected areas, which are among the most promising means we have. With these areas, we can achieve the possible reconciliation of sea preservation with the development of the coastal communities.

The Republic of Palau, together with other States in Micronesia, plays here a pioneering role that I wish to commend. Your initiatives in this field are benchmarks the world over. The shark conservation area you initiated is one of the most innovative approaches in this field and is followed with the greatest interest. Through this emblematic species of marine biodiversity, you have proved the value of these areas, which I believe are vital to preserve the balance of our seas. And I also wish to commend the "Micronesia Challenge" instigated by the Republic of Palau and implemented by the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands, whose purpose is to protect at least 30% of near shore marine resources and 20% of land resources.

Once again in this respect, our countries are similar. The Principality indeed prompted the creation of one of the first preservation areas for marine mammals in the Mediterranean, the Pelegos Sanctuary, which was set up over ten years ago with France and Italy. Prior to this, my Father initiated this practice more than thirty years ago when he created one of the first protected coastal areas in Monaco, the Larvotto Reserve. And, as head of the Monegasque State and with my Foundation, I act and campaign for the development of these areas, not only in the Mediterranean of course, but also in the Arctic and across all the seas of the globe.

It is with this in mind that three years ago I created the Monaco Blue Initiative, a think tank grouping together environmental activists, scientists, economic players and political leaders around marine issues. Among the topics it covers, marine protected areas hold a central place, as they represent a unique way of addressing the sea responsibly and for the benefit of the widest audience. That is why every effort must be made to develop them as far as possible.

Today, the UN estimates that 8.3 billion square kilometres, i.e. 2.3% of the world's oceans, are protected. This is obviously too little and we are still far from the 10% target set in Nagoya in 2010, and even farther from the 20%, which as far as I am concerned, is the level we need to reach in order to protect the oceans properly. But all around the world, an extensive movement is underway which I think is important to bring attention to and support. It concerns marine protected areas, but more generally it concerns ocean conservation and the protection of the planet.

Growing environmental awareness, which we have witnessed for the last fifteen years, is a groundswell that should encourage us to take action. I don't think that at any other time have we experienced such rapid and powerful development, capable of spreading across the entire

surface of the globe and radically changing a large number of certainties and reactions that we thought were eternal.

When we see today the largest emerging countries investing heavily in renewable energies, we fully understand that a major change is taking place in the world.

We are no longer alone. Millions of people are now aware of the dangers that threaten. They want to take action with us. They are asking for tools, prospects, examples. This is the sense of the environmental awareness campaigns I conduct across the globe, namely with my Foundation, actively involved in water, biodiversity and climate issues. And this is also the sense of the example embodied by your country. United together, we must unflaggingly inform, raise awareness and pave the way for our contemporaries.

Through its heritage, initiatives and determination, here the Republic of Palau plays a role model to which I would like to pay tribute.

I am thinking of course of your various initiatives concerning marine protected areas, which I mentioned a moment ago and which I would like to stress upon once again.

I am thinking of your constitution which, beginning with article VI, recognises environmental protection as a priority goal of the government, just as much as economic development, public safety, education and social justice. This constitutionalisation of the environment is for many States a model, and I hope, a goal.

I am also thinking of the draft resolution presented by your Republic to the UN and which seeks the opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the responsibility of greenhouse gas emitting States in climate change to which, as an island state, you are especially sensitive.

Lastly I am thinking of the fabulous example epitomised by your beautiful country, which suggests an efficient and sustainable way of driving forward development and environment together. By promoting responsible tourism, by developing sustainable fishing, shellfish farming, aquaculture and agriculture, you have proposed a model today which needs to be better known since it gives cause for hope.

When 40% of the world population lives less than 60 kilometres from the shore, a percentage which is growing due to tourism and migration, and when it is estimated that by the end of this century, 80% of the world population will be living side by side along a coastline of 100 kilometres, the world needs to come up with a new productive and beneficial way of living with the sea.

Because we should never forget that environmental protection cannot be dissociated from population development.

This is the case here, where the dangers relating to global warming are not only threatening a few species or a few landscapes, but are endangering the entire balance of your country.

This is the case in all hotspots of the planet, where humans, often the most vulnerable, are the victims of environmental degradation.

But this is the case more broadly speaking for all our contemporaries, who need to understand that their future is dependent on that of the planet. This is the challenge of our century: to think up a new way of producing, consuming, travelling, working, living, which is not based on the predation and destruction of natural resources.

It is a huge, yet exciting task. It is a choice that each of us must make. As Martin Luther King said "Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness."

As choices are becoming more necessary every day and dangers more threatening, I am pleased to be able to count on the Republic of Palau and on each one of you.

Thank you.