

*Bolstering oceans resilience :
how are new models bolstering ocean resilience and strengthening coastal economies ?
Davos – 25th January 2013
Address of H.S.H. the Prince*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

I am delighted to join you today to reflect on an issue that is too rarely taken into consideration.

Ocean resilience presents us with two essential imperatives:

- The first of course is the need to act quickly in order to save our natural environment.

We now know that their sustainability largely depends on our ability to take resolute decisions and to radically change our practices. And we are also aware that time is running out.

- The second imperative, mentioned less frequently, is the need to consider the oceans not as inert and passive materials, but as living organisms, which, as such, have an evolutionary rate and logic specific to them. All the damage inflicted upon them today will have extremely long-term consequences.

Subsequently, the question of resilience prompts us to look at the implications based on a genuine and above all long-term interaction process. In my view, this is

an essential step forward and that is why I am pleased to be able to attend this meeting today.

(A: Highlighting successful ocean conservation efforts)

For several years now, the ocean cause has made considerable progress and important initiatives have been taken. Although not all have been successful but they are proof of a positive shift in perception.

I would like to focus on a few of these initiatives:

- The conservation of certain particularly endangered species, which has moved beyond activist communities and emerged in political and economic terms. This is the very idea behind the initiative launched by Monaco on the bluefin tuna. Of course, it did not result in a temporary ban on the international trade of this animal.

this initiative, I believe, has enabled us to move forward in a decisive way by highlighting the responsibility of the various international competent bodies, starting with ICCAT, and by drawing public attention to a serious, yet little known phenomenon. It has led to a significant reduction in the catch quotas and more importantly to controls, which although are not perfect, have changed the situation considerably. Today scientists are beginning to observe an encouraging stabilisation in fish stocks and sizes. However, we must remain vigilant.

- The preservation of maritime areas has also made great strides. Although only 1,5% of the global maritime area is concerned by protective measures and despite the 10% target fixed in Nagoya in 2010 will be difficult to achieve, I am pleased to see that marine protected areas are developing across all the oceans of the world and are proving their efficiency. They present prospects for positive local cooperation, which I actively support through my Foundation.

- The continuation of international negotiations on the climate and biodiversity, in which I take part, should also be commended. Despite the delusions that have accompanied most of these major multilateral events, we should applaud the fact that everyone in both civil society and the corporate world - admittedly at a different pace and with different goals - is continuing to work towards a common goal. A global binding agreement, which addresses all ocean issues at once, will probably not be reached tomorrow. However, each step forward is to be welcomed.

- In my opinion, the greatest progress has been made is in the change of public opinion over the last fifteen years. Following the summits in Rio and Johannesburg, and today, despite the crisis, very few people doubt the need to protect the planet and its oceans.

(B: Emphasizing challenges and gaps)

Whilst each of these initiatives has brought its share of progress, we are well aware that this is still not sufficient. The dangers over the oceans are more worrying than ever, starting with climate change which threatens to disturb many ecosystems and to upset the entire ocean balance.

More specifically:

- Ocean acidification is currently one of the lesser known and yet the most powerful dangers. Already many shellfish farming regions are witness to its effects. And because this phenomenon occurs over an extremely slow period of time, these are only the first signs. Scientists currently predict an average decrease in the surface ocean pH of between 0.14 and 0.35 by 2100. While these figures show how serious the real situation is, the level of uncertainty remains higher due to the fact that the mechanisms at work are subject to extremely long-term patterns.

- New off-shore resources that climate or technological developments have now enabled us to exploit, also pose a serious threat. Whether it concerns the ultra-deep oil and gas reserves, the rare earth elements hidden under the seabed, or the new shipping routes which have opened up around the poles, the impact of any irresponsible exploitation could prove to be tragic in the extremely short term.

- Overfishing also poses problems and the prospect of a planet with 9 billion inhabitants gives us little hope of resolving this issue quickly.

All the more so, given that aquaculture is no more reassuring, since in certain situations up to five kilos of fish is needed to produce just one kilo. It is also the source of many forms of pollution, the transmission of epizootic disease and the evasion of domestic species to the natural environment. Because of overfishing, many species are currently in a critical situation. Their extinction, as always, would have repercussions on their entire biotope.

- Finally, I would like to say a few words on a few highly sensitive areas, where many threats accumulate. The oceans, as we all know, are not a unique and uniform reality. Certain semi-enclosed seas such as the Mediterranean, some coral reefs and the Arctic regions, areas as fragile as they are essential, are more endangered than others. It is therefore vital that we take particular care of them.

(C: Harmonizing global conservation activities)

Faced with the enormous challenge of preserving an entity as vast as the ocean, which represents over 70% of the earth's surface, the tools at our disposal still appear limited. The Montego Bay Convention does not always seem to be adapted to the new challenges posed by the seas. However I think it would be risky to initiate negotiations for a new global agreement today. We can already act, by focusing our efforts on a few key areas:

- Rather than attempting to reinvent the texts, I believe we should intensify our efforts, making the best use of what we have.

The Montego Bay Convention and other texts already enable us to implement highly valuable action, as we have seen with the marine protected areas or the Monegasque initiative I mentioned concerning the bluefin tuna. However, we must think about how they can be used in the most relevant manner and how to ensure coordination between the various existing bodies.

- Coastal preservation, on the other hand, is an issue for which simple action can be carried out.

Many of the scourges affecting the seas such as acidification, damage to biodiversity or jeopardising the most vulnerable biotopes, result at least partly

from coastal pollution and degradation. This is an area where action, since it is not subject to complex international agreements, is immediately possible. Protecting the coastline, implementing waste water treatment systems and regulating commercial coastal activities are among the various objectives on which we need to focus our efforts.

- In parallel with these efforts, I believe that we should increase scientific initiatives. If our oceans are suffering underestimated harm, this is due to gaps in our knowledge. It is frequently said that we have only explored an area of the deep ocean floor equivalent to the city of Paris, yet it covers almost two thirds of the Earth's surface. Its fauna and flora remain essentially a mystery. Likewise, only little is known about the mid-depths. Yet I believe that our ability to protect the oceans and to bolster their resilience depends primarily on our knowledge of them.

In conclusion, I feel that more than ever today it is essential to act, using all the means we have available.

These means are certainly not perfect, but they are many and have already led to several worthwhile initiatives.

As Martin Luther King said, "Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step."

Thank you.