

Opening Remarks

- Thank you Oleksandra
- I am so pleased that our schedules finally allowed me to attend my first Our Ocean Conference after some frustrating misses, and, this time, in stunning hospitable Malta. To the European Commission, thank you for the invitation to join you here.
- I am delighted to see so many friends and partners here from government, multilateral institutions, civil society, academia and business.
- And, I have been tremendously encouraged by the commitments made over these two days.
- Taken together, these are important steps to build upon the global agreements for climate and sustainable development and will help advance crucial efforts on international ocean governance, biodiversity and species protection, and the acceleration of a sustainable blue economy.
- Congratulations Commissioner Vella and all your team for the impeccable organization of these very productive meetings.
- From a young age while living on the Pacific ocean I began a lifelong passion, respect and appreciation for what the oceans mean to all of us as the source and sustenance of life, inspiration and joy, food, jobs and regulation of climate, for billions across the world.
- In my conservation work in the ME and beyond over the past 4 decades, I have also become intensely aware of the, all too often overlooked, strategic importance of these vital building blocks of stability and peace, in discussion and policymaking.

- We all know that the ocean is in deep trouble and so are we as many have stressed throughout the conference. To quote my dearest ocean mentor and fellow Ocean Elder, Dr. Sylvia Earle, “No Blue. No Green.”
- Many of you have dedicated your lives and work to the science, the research and exploration, and the politics of our planet’s future. It is my enormous privilege to be with and to learn from you. In turn, I would like to share some perspectives from my experiences in the developing world and, in particular, our region- a region suffering extremely from the major stressors of decades of challenging economic, energy and environmental management and, of course, climate change.
- Over the past 40 years, I have seen clearly the linkage between the transnational impacts of these and the concomitant human insecurity and political instability that threatens us all no matter where we may live.
- As my friend, the human rights champion, Mary Robinson, recently said “the profound injustice of climate change is that those who are most vulnerable in society, no matter the level of development of the country in question, will suffer most. People who are marginalized or poor, women, and indigenous communities are being disproportionately affected by climate impacts.”
- Such injustice will only intensify in the years and decades to come if we don’t curb rising sea levels, ocean warming, the decline of fish stocks, pollution and ocean acidification which will lead to increasing deprivation and volatility in coastal communities and countries.
- An outcome from this conference will be, I hope, an increased emphasis on the cause and effect relationship between climate change and ocean ecosystem collapse with critical economic decline, poverty and malnutrition, crime, trafficking, the

destabilization and polarization of societies, and the massive migration of populations seeking food and economic security.

- Put simply, environmental crises are having dangerous international consequences right now. These linkages need to be better communicated to all sectors of society regardless of coastal proximity.
- In many ways, the Middle East's marine environment is both a microcosm and a magnification of global problems. From the Atlantic to the Indian ocean, including the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Gulf, Arab countries have over 30,000 kilometers of coastline – a fragile environment threatened by pollution, over-fishing, loss of biodiversity, climate change, and large-scale industrial activity, including petrochemical and energy plants on the coasts as well as the world's heaviest tanker traffic on the seas. In addition, our region includes coastal countries that are among the highest plastic bottled water and plastic bag consumers in the world; some consuming 33% more plastics than the world average.
- In Jordan from the early 1980s, we played a pioneering regional conservation role incorporating those priorities into development initiatives promoting human security and conflict resolution.
- We saw the most progress when we integrated environmental awareness and conservation programming with educational, cultural, tourism and economic empowerment programs focused on women and vulnerable communities and into our training and capacity building support to other countries in the region. And, of critical importance, we found that mobilizing and empowering local communities to

participate in the planning and implementation of development and ecosystem management increased the likelihood of success.

- Multi-stakeholder engagement is important because regionally and globally, we are on a path to increasing destabilizing competition between countries for scarce resources within national waters and beyond as we are seeing, for example, with the intensifying of conflicts among local and industrial fishers, authorities, and countries or the increase of piracy partly as a result from the depletion of African coastal fish stocks.
- And, while many countries and regions now struggle with the dislocation of millions of people due to conflict or social upheaval, underlying, but too often overlooked, causes are water resource mismanagement and climate change related as in, for example, Syria, Sudan, and Yemen.
- At the same time, sudden onset disasters such as hurricanes, typhoons or coastal flooding like the recent Caribbean hurricanes, Irma and Maria, or the massive floods in India, Bangladesh and Nepal, have impacted millions.
- Slow-onset events like sea level rise or ocean acidification are projected to impact millions more.
- The long-term projections are staggering with hundreds of millions of people needing to move from their homes in search of shelter and economic opportunity.
- In all, approx 1/122 people on earth is displacedThere, but for the grace of God go, you and I. Please think about that as you explore and craft future policies and advocacies because as I have seen in my work with the global challenges of the displaced, the missing, the marginalized, and with those suffering crushing poverty,

the implications of such massive suffering are dire, not only today for those immediately affected, but for coming generations, everywhere- in the loss of educated, productive human potential required to rebuild nations or conflict regions, and, also in dangerous unprecedented polarization, and other potential drivers of radicalization and future violence from loss of hope and confidence in the future .

- We are here at this conference because in spite of all the evidence and available data and discouraging short-sighted political trends, we have faith that together we can make a difference to build upon the encouraging global progress of the past several years beginning with 2015's momentous climate and SDG agreements.
- 2015 also gave us two historic faith proclamations released in advance of COP 21 to mobilize support for its goals- both calls to humanity of no matter what faith, to work together to protect the Earth upon which we depend, based upon foundations, in fact, shared by most if not all faith doctrines.
- The [Islamic Declaration on Climate Change](#) endorsed by Islamic scholars from around the world was a powerful statement on why Muslims should be activists for the welfare of the planet.
- the Muslim Quran tells us how Allah created every living creature from water and our teachings instruct us in our fundamental responsibilities -
- *"The Earth is green and beautiful, and Allah has appointed you his stewards over it. The whole Earth has been created a place of worship, pure and clean.*
- The Declaration called upon world leaders and the business community to address the actions and behavior that cause climate change- addressing prosperous nations and oil-producing states to phase out their emissions, avoid "unethical profit from

the environment" and invest in a green economy and, I would add, 'blue' economy. Also adding that adaptation should also be prioritized, particularly for the most vulnerable groups.

- Pope Francis' 2015 Papal Encyclical on the environment appealed for 'a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet' - 'a conversation which includes everyone.
- (In a Jewish midrash, God says, "*See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.*")

In Hinduism, protecting the environment is an important expression of dharma...duty.. virtue.. impact on karma

A Buddhist treaty states "*By injuring any part of the world's system, you injure yourself.*" (oped)

- Faith communities are fairly universally taught that we are responsible for the welfare of more than ourselves including the world around us and should, I believe, be natural allies as we now grapple with implementation of our global agreements.
- Further, I believe that we have a profound opportunity for a multi-faith initiative including leaders from major global religions to mobilize individuals and communities of all faiths to help grow and unify the ranks of engaged citizens and foster interfaith collaboration on a most important issue of our time. In my humble opinion, we have not yet fully capitalized on the combined reach and influence of our faith leaders around the world.

- And I, personally, am committed to work on this because I believe that it is not only a question of long term species survival but also of the short-term survival of millions of members of our planetary family.
- The science and data tells us we have to act but it is our humanity that compels us to.
- Thank you and thank you again to Commissioner Vella and his team.