

Secretary John F. Kerry
2017 Our Oceans Remarks (As Prepared)
October 6, 2017

Thank you, Kristina. And thank you for all of your leadership on these important issues. It is a special privilege to be back for the 4th Our Ocean Conference.

Three years ago, when we all began this effort, some of the chattering class in the world of foreign policy sort of raised an eyebrow and asked, “what does the oceans have to do with the State Department? In a complicated world, how can a ministry of Foreign Affairs really elevate this issue?”

But now, almost four years later, and after the first three conferences generated over \$9.2 billion in commitments and 3.8 million square miles of newly protected ocean, I think we can safely say that the movement we together created isn’t just alive, it is essential – and it continues to bring world leaders, industry, foundations, and NGOs together to solve one of the greatest challenges of our time.

And as Chile and now the EU and soon Indonesia, Norway, and in 2020 Palau are making clear: responsibility to lead on this issue has never and will never belong just to any one country or one Ministry, it is our collective responsibility to lead – and it is our collective determination to act.

Now, some may still wonder – of all the world’s challenges – why are countries investing so many resources to solve this one -- and why now? The answer is simple: because when you believe in science you understand—this really is a life and death issue. So we have no other choice because time is running out. This movement is about the next generation being able to count on the oceans that our generation took for granted – and sometimes pushed to the brink of breaking.

The same ocean where I grew up fishing does something much more important for all of humanity, and you’ve encompassed it eloquently in your conference title this year: “An Ocean for Life,” because the oceans literally sustain life on Earth as we know it. They produce half the world's oxygen, create the clouds that bring us fresh water, and they regulate our climate. More than a billion people rely on fish for their primary source of protein and fishing is a half a trillion-dollar global industry. It is also an economic driver where one in six American jobs and one in four jobs

globally depend on the ocean. Just take a moment to calculate how long our way of life can endure if any of those things we take for granted start disappearing.

Today, it is no exaggeration to note that it's all under threat – but unlike the world's perennial and complicated threats of sectarian hatreds or the rise of extremism, there's no real debate regarding the root causes or sustainable solutions to this global challenge. The questions and the answers are in the mirror staring right back at us: human activity threatens the world's ocean; illegal fishing decimates fisheries; a garbage patch twice the size of Texas that human beings collectively created floats in the Pacific; and rising carbon dioxide levels from emissions increase ocean acidity, devastating coral reefs and marine life. Climate change itself is changing the basic chemistry of the ocean faster than it has in the last 50 million years—a time span which scientists have the ability to actually measure. It is threatening some marine life that may simply die out because it can no longer survive in the very waters that have nourished it since time began. There are more than 500 dead zones throughout the ocean – areas where life simply cannot exist. The damage has now reached such an extreme level that unless we change our practices, by the middle of this century there will be more plastic in the water than fish.

So my friends we have met the enemy – and it is man-made. But that means mankind can also provide the solution. It's a question of political will, not capacity: We can restore the health of our ocean for this generation and those to come.

I am now a private citizen for the first time in nearly forty years but I am more committed to this fight than ever. Why? Because citizenry get the job done governments will require continued prodding and partnership -- from businesses that depend on a healthy ocean, from everyday activists making the oceans a priority, and from non-governmental organizations and philanthropic efforts that provide best practices and proof of theory that yes, answers really are within our grasp. Supply chain companies can send behavior-changing market signals that galvanize action beyond what many governments can only dream about doing, including by making sustainable seafood a competitive advantage and an incentive for private sector suppliers that want their fish to be in your supermarket.

No country, no government, and no individual can solve any of these problems alone. Just as humanity shares a common dependence on the ocean, we must join in a common endeavor to save the ocean from the damage caused by humans. And

we don't have a minute to waste. Protecting our ocean isn't a luxury. It is a necessity -- for our economy, our climate and our way of life.

The good news is that in recent years, the world has started to come together around these challenges like never before. The tide is beginning to turn.

Together, through the Our Ocean Conferences, we brought partners together to crack down on illegal fishing – for example, through the Safe Ocean Network more than 50 governments and NGO partners came together last year to better detect IUU fishing, enforce laws, and prosecute those who break them.

But that's just the start of what I know we can do together, and what we must do. It's why I'm launching a new partnership between the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Julie Packard and the Monterey Bay Aquarium on initiatives to create greater incentives for sustainable fishing across Southeast Asia, to create cooperation and collaboration, and help prove that sustainable fishing is good for jobs and the environment at the same time. By examining some of the key commodity species – shrimp, tuna and crab – in some of these countries in Southeast Asia – I know we can make progress working in partnership with government not against them, producing high quality products for the export market in a way that protects both species and profits. We can do these things. It's in that same spirit that I am working with the remarkable Donna Bertarelli and my old friends at Pew to tap into the talents of former heads of state and ministers around the world and turn more ocean admirers into ocean activists so we can reach for the goal of putting 30% of the ocean to be placed in marine protected areas by 2030.

We can reach these goals. I know we can.

And in all of our efforts—in meeting this challenge— we should be inspired by the examples of what's come before us. We know that we can make progress on these issues, and we're buoyed by the example of recent years on issues where naysayers once declared progress impossible. Rule-of-law initiatives like the Port State Measures Agreement once sat stagnant; when we convened the first Our Ocean conferences in 2014, only 10 nations had ratified it, far short of the 25 states required to bring it into force. Because all of us together decided we could do better— we did! Today, more than 60 nations, including the United States, have now ratified the Port State Measures Agreement. As a result, it's going to be much

more difficult for fishermen to conduct illegal fishing and then to come to port and sell their fish. Together, we're establishing some accountability.

And that's not the only success story. Chile has finalized two large MPAs around the islands of Juan Fernandez and Easter Island. The Cook Islands has created a marine park and banned industrial fishing 50 miles from its shores. And just yesterday, here in Malta, one of the smallest nations on Earth - Niue (NEW-ay)- set aside 40% of its ocean territory as a strongly protected marine reserve. My friends, if Niue with a population of 1,600 can protect 40% of its ocean, then think what hundreds of millions of us together can do to achieve the science-based target of 30% global protection. Small island nations - or as my friend President Remengesau of Palau calls them, big ocean states - are punching above their weight while also being disproportionately impacted by poor ocean health. The developed world can do more and should do more.

So yes, the tide is turning. Working together, we can begin to change the current course – so that long after we are gone, our grandkids can chart a course to a sustainable future. That's a mission that should unite even in a time of division – in Malta and every day afterwards, we must all stay committed to win a race against the clock.

This is personal to all of us gathered here and it should be. But it needs to be personal for people everywhere—people who are not here, don't know this conference is taking place but have a huge stake in the outcome. How could it not be? The sheer power of the ocean, its poignant, incomparable grandeur, is something that humans have felt viscerally from the earliest days. Our awe at the ocean's life-giving power and its beauty has been captured by our most sacred religious texts, our great philosophies, our art and our literature. Achilles declared in *The Iliad*, “The ocean is the source of all.” Isaac Newton pursued, as he described, “the great ocean of truth.” Walt Whitman called the sea “a continual miracle.” Sarojini Naidu described the ocean as “our mother” and the waves as “our comrades.” And President Kennedy said simply, “when we go back to the sea, whether it is to sail or to watch, we are going back from whence we came.”

We are here in Malta because we are too aware that while the sea itself will never cease, the same cannot be necessarily be said for us or for the life within it. Rachel Carson was sadly prophetic nearly seventy years ago when she wrote, “It is a curious situation that the sea, from which life first arose, should now be threatened by the activities of one form of that life. But the sea, though changed in a sinister way, will continue to exist. The threat is, rather, to life itself.”

We are here in Malta because we know this threat is real and it is serious. We understand that we must do more and we have to do it faster. We're not going to be the prisoners of history; we're going to change the course of history. That's the commitment that brings us together – not just to change course, but to change course in time. Let's get the job done! Thank you.

So this is the challenge that we are here to address today. I am honored to be joined by an extraordinary panel, please welcome: President Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr. of Palau; Ghana's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey; Norway's Minister of Climate and the Environment, Vidar Helgesen; Indonesia's Deputy Coordinating Minister of Maritime Affairs Ambassador Arif Havas Oegroseno; and from Ecuador, Ana Katuska Drouet.