Agenda item 3.1

Draft Statement of the Chair at the 30th session of the IOC Assembly

Dear delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

When we met here in Paris for the previous session of the IOC Assembly in 2017, one of the highlights was the resolution on the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The then President of the UN General Assembly, later UN Special Envoy for the Ocean, Peter Thomson, and UNESCO DG Irina Bokova were among the distinguished contributors. The assembly in 2017 took place shortly after the UN Ocean Conference in New York. The IOC had 148 Member States.

When I look back at my statement from 2017 and other documents from that time, I see that we were excited because of an emerging awareness about the ocean and the possibilities of contributing with science. Now I am quite confident that the biennium from 2017 to 2019 has been even more eventful than the former and more positive than ever for the ocean, ocean science and the IOC. People realize that a healthy ocean is needed for delivery of the ocean based services that the world will depend on, probably more and more. Many nations, groups, businesses, forces in society, people at large now care about the ocean and also turn to the ocean for solutions. The Decade was proclaimed by the UNGA in December 2017 and we have started the planning phase based on decision at the IOC Executive Council in 2018. The IOC has reached 150 Member States and we are seeing active contributions to IOC activities from a wider range of MSs than we used to. This engagement has to increase further if the IOC is to fulfil its mandate in the future.

I am conscious of the big differences among Member States in terms of capacities and capabilities. Many of these differences are brought up by the Global Ocean Science Report, a flagship product of the IOC, recognized in the UN system as measuring progress against Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 14.A, and coming in its next edition in 2020. This report should be seen and used as a pointer to the needs for capacity building. I sincerely believe that SDG target 14.A provides a very strong imperative for all MSs so I will read it out in full:

"Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries"

This is a call for action and it is agreed by all Member States of the UN at the highest level. Let us not forget to capitalize on this recognition of ocean science and related issues handled by the IOC when we try to stimulate and argue for participation and joining forces in programs and activities.
Not only science capacity, but also representation in Paris and ability to take part here varies quite a bit between Member States. In order to engage UNESCO Member State delegations also informally between governing body meetings, the Friends of the Ocean group here at UNESCO was initiated by the Norwegian UNESCO delegation some time ago. Lately, elected IOC officers took part in a Friends of the Ocean meeting here in January 2019 providing perspectives and answers to Member States on a range of issues raised. In May 2019 I provided updates in a Friends of the Ocean meeting co-chaired by Norway and the Seychelles focussing on preparations for this assembly. I hope these contributions from your elected officers has been useful.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank my fellow officers for their engagement in a series of important processes both internal to the IOC and representing IOC in the UN system, in the regions and in a range of other fora. I believe that giving IOC officers increased responsibilities between meetings is a good way to strengthen the IOC, its visibility and recognition, and something to keep in mind in the present and future sessions and for tasks emerging. The selection of Members of the Decade Executive Planning Group, leading the Intersessional Financial Advisory Group, Capacity Development work and Consultations with WMO are prime examples in the present intersessional period of elected vice chairs standing up to the challenge and putting in significant and sometimes crucial efforts.

I have had the pleasure of leading IOC delegations to sessions of the Intergovernmental Conference (under UNCLOS) on a legally binding instrument for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) in September last year and March this year at the UN in New York. I also contributed together with many others in the IOC "family" to the Informal Consultative Process on Ocean and the Law of the Sea in New York in June. This year the full 4-day meeting very appropriately was focussed on ocean science and the decade. In all these occasions I have found it very fruitful when presenting the IOC, our mission and specific issues, that both members of the IOC Secretariat and representatives of Member States are active in complementary roles.

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC of UNESCO) was created in 1960 to coordinate ocean science at the international level. The Scientific Committee on Oceanic Research (SCOR) had been formed shortly before in order to further ocean research, but it was recognized that an intergovernmental body (the IOC) was needed in addition to the nongovernmental SCOR. When the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was established, IOC was recognized as the competent body for ocean science in the UN system. The IOC Member States have gradually given the organization several roles and responsibilities beyond collaboration and coordination of ocean science in a strict sense, including scientific support to decision making of Member States, capacity building, standard setting, sustained observations, securing, storing and sharing of data, and services including tsunami warning systems.

Other UN organizations with global scope as well as regional organizations related to the UN and outside the UN system are also involved in coordination of ocean science. I believe at this time we are seeing clear evidence that the IOC mandate is
as relevant as ever. On the other hand, there are so many more actors and possible contributors that leading collaboration and ensuring coordination requires clever and modern approaches, becoming ever more effective, and recognizing the need for division of labor between IGOs, MSs, other organizations and institutions.

During the present intersessional period I continued my tour of UN bodies. I believe that discussion with Member States at Governing Body meetings is essential to ensure engagement in key issues and involvement towards collaboration with the IOC. In addition to links to IHO, UN Environment, International Seabed Authority, DOALOS and others, I managed to take part in the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) session in Rome in 2018 where I presented the decade and invited collaboration. And it was a great privilege and pleasure for me to take part in the Ocean Dialogue at the 18th World Meteorological Congress in June 2019, following earlier discussions at the WMO Executive Council meeting the year before. WMO involvement is essential to reach several of the SDG-related ocean outcomes that have been formulated for the Decade. I am happy to report that I find that the WMO, despite it being a much larger and more powerful organization than the IOC is treating the IOC as an equal partner. This is well reflected in documents for related agenda items at this assembly. And my heartfelt thanks go to all those who have put so much effort into the very successful IOC-WMO consultations.

The communication between WMO and IOC has been particularly strong and active over the last years. JCOMM was a great success from the start and has served us well for 20 years. Now we take one further step expanding the collaboration beyond oceanography and marine meteorology to a strategic partnership covering all aspects of common interest. I am convinced that the arrangements for the Collaborative Board which we want to get started, will serve us well. With its setup we will be able to combine a top-down input from elected leadership with bottom-up technical and scientific expertise, we will strengthen the Global Ocean Observing System and a range of related groups dealing with observations, data exchange and modelling. This is a modern way for intergovernmental organizations to work together in a world where technology offers new opportunities at a faster pace than ever and where also non-governmental bodies and private industry need to be engaged.

World Ocean Day last month very appropriately was dedicated to gender aspects. In ocean science, which is dominated by Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (the STEM disciplines), the gender balance in terms of the fraction of female scientists is considerably better than in STEM topics generally, 38% vs 28% according to the IOC Global Ocean Science Report. But this fraction of females among ocean scientists is not enough. In particular we really need to take steps to get more women in leadership positions in ocean science institutions and programmes, including those of the IOC.

A consistent driving force over the past 60 years for truly global coordination of ocean science, has been the recognition that the ocean is too big for any single nation, even the most powerful of nations, to observe, study and understand alone. Division of labor makes sense. Then, for science to make progress, observational data have to be shared. Recognizing the scale of many oceanic phenomena which
require observations from a large area in order to be described properly and e.g. in terms of tsunamis and storms to be forecasted in order to save lives, provides another impetus for data sharing. Concerns over cross border pollution, global environmental change give further motivation for coordination including planning of observation programs and data sharing.

The need for international coordination of ocean science and related activities has probably never been stronger than today. Unless ocean science work is distributed among all Member States with resources, and more Member States are empowered (SDG target 14.A), more lives will get lost, ocean resources will not be harvested in the way which humanity needs and the risk of conflicts increase. The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) provides a unique opportunity not only to strengthen ocean science and knowledge about the ocean, but also to carefully consider strengthening of the mechanisms for coordination and data sharing. This is particularly relevant to ocean assessments and the yet-to-be-negotiated legally binding instrument for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

The perspective from now until 2030, is the time frame agreed by all members of the United Nations to be crucial for a sustainable future. Within the next decade, the goal is to provide nutritious food, clean energy, water, medical services and decent living conditions for all people on Earth in a sustainable way, i.e. without overstepping the carrying capacity of the planet. Few believe that this can be done without harvesting more from the ocean and increasing activity at sea. Yet, the ocean and its ecosystem services are under threat from pollution and climate change.

Ocean science based solutions are needed and they are needed fast. Open innovation, sharing of knowledge, best practices and collaboration will be imperative. The decade is coming at exactly the right time. It invites and encourages governments, institutions and individuals to play a leading role in putting ocean science to work for our global common future. This is not a race where the aim is to leave others behind. On the contrary, now is the time to lead by example. The future we all want requires a healthy ocean and sustainable use of its resources. "The science we need for the ocean we want" is not only a slogan for the decade but can also be interpreted to encompass the essence of what IOC is all about. Therefore I hope that the decade is seen as an enabling mechanism for strengthening the key strategic priorities and contributing to the High Level Objectives of the IOC as we move into the coming decade. We should do this, not to serve ourselves but for nothing less than the future of the planet. I believe people can make a difference. I believe the IOC can make a difference. Let us do what it takes!