

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD OCEANS DAY

8 June 2009

The first observance of World Oceans Day allows us to highlight the many ways in which oceans contribute to society. It is also an opportunity to recognize the considerable challenges we face in maintaining their capacity to regulate the global climate, supply essential ecosystem services and provide sustainable livelihoods and safe recreation.

Indeed, human activities are taking a terrible toll on the world's oceans and seas. Vulnerable marine ecosystems, such as corals, and important fisheries are being damaged by over-exploitation, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, destructive fishing practices, invasive alien species and marine pollution, especially from land-based sources. Increased sea temperatures, sea-level rise and ocean acidification caused by climate change pose a further threat to marine life, coastal and island communities and national economies.

Oceans are also affected by criminal activity. Piracy and armed robbery against ships threaten the lives of seafarers and the safety of international shipping, which transports 90 per cent of the world's goods. Smuggling of illegal drugs and the trafficking of persons by sea are further examples of how criminal activities threaten lives and the peace and security of the oceans.

Several international instruments drawn up under the auspices of the United Nations address these numerous challenges. At their centre lies the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It provides the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, and is the basis for international cooperation at all levels. In addition to aiming at universal participation, the world must do more to implement this Convention and to uphold the rule of law on the seas and oceans.

The theme of World Oceans Day, "Our oceans, our responsibility", emphasizes our individual and collective duty to protect the marine environment and carefully manage its resources. Safe, healthy and productive seas and oceans are integral to human well-being, economic security and sustainable development.