

16 April 2018

Statement by H.E. Mr Miroslav Lajčák, President of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly, at the Organizational Meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference on an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction

[as delivered]

Excellencies, Colleagues – Good morning

I will start by stating the obvious. Marine biodiversity knows no boundaries. We have identified gaps in its management. And the only way to solve it is by coming up with a global agreement. Multilateralism has brought us to this point and it is the tool we need to take us forward. At a time when multilateralism is being challenged, this is an example of it at work.

From the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, negotiated over 40 years ago – to the task that we face now – an agreement on an Internationally legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, multilateralism is the common thread.

This conference will see all Member States and States Parties sitting in a room, listening to one another and engaging in a dialogue. We are all working towards one important goal: to develop a treaty to protect our marine biodiversity. This is multilateralism in action.

And the United Nations is uniquely placed to be the forum for negotiating this treaty.

Over the coming days, you will start creating your roadmap for the next two years. I have no doubt that Ambassador Lee will ably lead this process. Congratulations on your election today Madame President.

I would also like to use this opportunity to make two points.

First, we should all recognize that, for a sustainable future, we need healthy oceans.

From critical ecosystems like deep sea corals that help to sustain life – to plants and animals with medicinal value, we have so many reasons to conserve our marine resources.

If we want to ensure a decent life for all on a sustainable planet, we conserve and sustainably use our oceans. After all, more than 3 billion people rely on it for their livelihoods.

Yet we continue to abuse this precious resource. But we now have the opportunity to protect biodiversity in the high seas through a legally binding treaty.

And we must do this in an inclusive way – ensuring that everyone concerned has a seat in the room – which is my second point. Member States and States Parties will have the leading role.

But we cannot go it alone. We need to hear from everyone, including, scientists, academia and legal experts. Also, the support of the United Nations system is crucial. This inclusive approach can only make discussions better – our outcomes stronger.

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

Today, as we enter a new phase of this process, we must bear in mind not only our mandate. But also, our duty to people – to protect our seas.

A few weeks ago, I received a letter from a boy whose name is Lars – an elementary school student from Seattle. He was seriously concerned about the health of our oceans. I don't think he has ever heard of the "BBNJ". But he knows that we need to act urgently.

Let us remember the impact of our work on people like Lars.

We do not have other oceans we can use, when our current ones are depleted. That is why we need to act now.

I wish you a productive meeting and a successful outcome.