

**Statement by João Paulo Oliveira e Costa as an Academic Stakeholder during the 2020 UN Ocean Conference Preparatory Meeting. UN Headquarters, NYC, 05.02.2020**

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to represent the UNESCO Chair on “**The Oceans Cultural Heritage**”, of Nova University in Lisbon, Portugal. As an academic **partner of the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage**, we focus on researching, teaching and disseminating knowledge about the precious human legacy located under water and along the coasts of the ocean.

I am here to express the strong conviction that underwater cultural heritage is a public asset and not a private affair. Humanity has always lived close to the water. It developed in its very first beginnings on areas that are today covered by the waves and has left important information on the seabed. Humans have also throughout history travelled the oceans and build their civilisations on these voyages. We would all of us not be sitting here, if the ocean would not be of long-standing historic importance to us.

As a representative of Humanities let me hence emphasise the **crucial importance of History**, because nobody can live without a memory, a single person and even more so a large community are lost. The oceans contain crucial evidence of our global past and only knowledge of this past allows us to find the way to a sustainable future.

Having attended UNESCO meetings in Africa and in Asia, I realised that underwater cultural heritage is perceived as a hope for the construction of a more accurate and equal memory of humanity’s past, as well as an important asset for the creation of museums and touristic attractions.

Therefore, the scientific community of historians and underwater archaeologists and I ask strongly that the protection of **underwater cultural heritage shall be discussed in June**, in

my city of Lisbon, in order to develop policies that integrate not only economic, but also cultural aspects.

We need to work together to avoid the pillage of our heritage by treasure hunters, reinforce identities and develop a sustainable life for our communities, especially at the coast.

I coordinate a project dealing with the historic development of port cities linking the work of academic and non-academic stakeholders from America, Europe and Africa. Such cooperative scientific projects are of great importance for **Small Island Developing States**. Cape Verdean politicians asked for instance last month strongly for the enlargement of our related underwater archaeological missions to other parts of the country, as they are expecting that in a near future sunken sites can provide a new form of tourism for small islands. Such sound archaeological work in the service of ocean protection and sustainable development should be reproduced anywhere in the world. We are **now well positioned to actively contribute for intersectoral and interdisciplinary cooperation at the national, regional and global levels**.

However, for that we need the support of all States and **the clear inclusion of cultural heritage** in the roadmap of Lisbon as well as in the UN Science Decade.

I also draw attention to the fact that the **UNESCO 2001 Convention** on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage provides a **model for protecting sites in international waters**, without infringing the regulations of UNCLOS. This is a great chance for the **BBNJ process** and should be carefully taken into consideration as this example has already been accepted by now 63 States.

Finally, please bear in mind that the safeguarding of our underwater cultural heritage goes **hand with hand with the conservation of our natural heritage**. We cannot live without a healthy ocean as much as we cannot live without the evidences of our common history.