

Statement of the organized constituency of Local and Regional Governments on Ocean

Planetary urbanization & life below water

Local and regional governments throughout the world, gathered in the networks of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, are committed to an integrated localization of global agendas. At the forefront of many of the current world's economic, social and environmental challenges, we recall that the New Urban Agenda, the SDGs, the Sendai Framework, and the Paris Agreement interplay and their successful realization require coordinated efforts at all levels.

Last June 8th, the world celebrated the oceans day, to remind the unique importance of the ocean in our everyday life. Largely unknown and often forgotten, the ocean covers 70% of the planet's surface and plays a crucial role for its functioning. Our ocean holds a fundamental share of life on the planet, generates vital amount of oxygen and absorbs a significant part of carbon dioxide emissions.

The right to healthy and sustainable ocean and seas is thus a Human Right. Accordingly, the Law of the Sea represents an important milestone in our history, as one of the earliest recognition of the ocean and maritime resources as a worldwide common good, which requires global attention and coordination. It is our duty to seek the appropriate global commitments to safeguard the rights of future generations and ensure the sustainability of life on Earth.

Human activity adds critical pressure to the ocean, seas and marine resources. Pollution, plastics disposal and marine litter, as well as unsustainable fishing and other practices can endanger the balance of our ecosystems and the maintenance of our common goods. Climate change contributes to hurricanes, ocean acidification and increased sea rise levels, which place immediate concerns to governments at all levels, especially the coastal ones, or the ones in Small Islands Developing States (SIDS).

Local and regional governments, and their associations and networks, gathered through the Global Taskforce, recognize that the protection of our ocean is pivotal in our joint fight towards the conservation of the common goods and natural resources. The ocean and maritime ecosystems are a paramount source of biodiversity, food and jobs, and represent cultural values deeply embodied by traditional communities, islands and coastal cities.

The effects of human activity and urbanization transcend city boundaries in many senses. Our constituency has turned the spotlight on the importance of the urban-rural continuum, observing the interconnections among our cities and broader territories, particularly in their constant flow of goods, services and resources. Hence, we acknowledged the pertinence of our local and regional governments, especially intermediary cities and small towns, to a sustainable development model.

In accordance with SDG 14 on Life Below Water, it is fundamental that we also stress the presence of 'urban-ocean linkages', and call upon the engagement of local and regional governments in global efforts and decisions to protect the ocean and maritime resources, including food:

- Local and regional governments are committed to pursuing the necessary global ecological transition, particularly in the face of unprecedented threats. Our constituency contributes to raising the ambition of the world's efforts to tackle the climate emergency, and accordingly contributes to a sustainable use and the conservation of our ocean and seas;

- The sustainable management and protection of islands and coastal areas poses additional challenges and risks to our cities and regions, which require greater resilience to endure future distresses. Through topics as water, sanitation and waste management, circular and blue economy,

protected areas, ecotourism, fishing and others, governments at all levels can interact and contribute to enhance territorial cohesion, and reduce marine pollution, the loss of habitats and biodiversity;

- In order to do so, the capacity of local and regional governments in building sustainable management models needs to be looked at. Particularly, the capacity of SIDS and their cities to respond to global challenges should be further considered in light of the aggregated risks faced due to ocean and sea degradation. Affronted with accelerated climate change, local communities living on islands and coastal areas become more vulnerable and are severely affected by the changes in the marine ecosystems;

- Considering its proximity to citizens, local and regional governments can join and facilitate the collaboration with communities and stakeholders in processes of co-creation to define common actions to protect coast and marine ecosystems, especially to preserve the rights of future generations for a healthy planet;

- Concerned with the future of humankind, local and regional governments stand for a strong multilateral system, which adopts the protection of the ocean and seas as the backbone of a worldwide Nature Pact, in line with the vision "Living in Harmony with Nature" and the discussions for a new global biodiversity framework. It is urgent to address the necessary ecological transition of our economies and societies, in defense of humanity's rights for a sustainable planet;

- Our networks are willing to join the decision-making table on biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, convening a powerful voice at the global agendas, while promoting opportunities for peer-learning, exchange of experiences and scale-up of effective practices among local and regional governments;

- Ahead of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021 - 2030, we highlight the crucial role of multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder collaboration to strengthen the science-policy interface, as well as to improve data systems and seek innovative solutions at all levels.

In view of the next generation of multilateralism, we emphasize the importance of including local and regional government at the table of global negotiations. In this regard, we welcome the organization of a Local and Regional Governments segment at the UN Ocean Conference - Scaling up Ocean Action Based on Science and Innovation for the Implementation of Goal 14: Stocktaking, Partnerships and Solution.

The leadership of local and regional governments on these topics, provided that collaboration with other spheres of governments is fostered, could turn the tide of global ocean degradation. Through a strong global cooperation, our constituency is committed to protecting our planet, societies and source of food.

23 of June 2020