

Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul

Statement

(Preparatory Meeting for the Oceans Conference)

The world is treating our oceans as bottomless landfills. Millions of metric tons of plastic waste alone are dumped into them. According to General Assembly President Peter Thomson, the equivalent of one garbage truck's contents is dumped into an ocean each minute. That would amount to waste from 525,600 garbage trucks per year pouring into these precious waters. Oceans are further overfished. Their temperatures and sea levels are rising, killing coral and eating away at coastlands. Carbon emissions are raising the acidification of oceans. Marine life is facing multiple threats. It is urgent that we immediately turn the tide on practices which are harming our world's oceans, their ecosystems, and ourselves. As Pope Francis advises us, we all must band together to protect our common home.

We will approach this statement from the perspective of four "P's"—pollution, the Paris Climate Agreement, protection, and patrols. These are topics we would wish to have discussed at the June Oceans Conference in New York.

POLLUTION—With five major garbage gyres, our oceans are hosting immense areas of trash. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch alone is twice the size of Texas. It contains plastic which can run 9 feet deep. In some places within the gyre there is six times more plastic than plankton, according to garbagepatch.net. Even plankton is ingesting microscopic pieces of plastic. One can only imagine the effects of plastic moving up the food chain from plankton to humans. Meanwhile, whales are dying from ingested plastic bags and turtles become entangled in six-pack rings.

From fishing gear to glass bottles to medical waste to waste from ships, so much more trash other than plastic also finds its way into oceans. Ghost nets entangle marine life. Debris washes up on islands. Oil, fertilizers, sewage, soil runoff, and toxic chemicals from industries add to the polluted potage of our oceans. Dead zones are emerging. Such refuse not only causes serious harm to marine creatures and destroys ecosystems, but also affects local economies.

We plead that the June Oceans Conference calls for immediate and significant trash removal from our oceans on a massive scale, combined with global awareness programs, and cooperation in ceasing garbage and waste disposal into oceans.

PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT: Oceans produce over half of our oxygen and absorb about 30 per cent of CO₂, according to Tara Expeditions Foundation. They are vital to our breathing. But their vitality is in jeopardy due to climate-related issues. Acidification of oceans, connected with the uptake of carbon dioxide, could increase by 150 per cent by 2100. Already we are witnessing profound effects of this acidification, such as an alarming decline of healthy coral. Carbon emissions must be reduced.

In addition to affecting marine life, carbon emissions cause humans to suffer. About 634 million people live at sea level or no higher than 10 meters above it, according to the Climate News Network. Small Island Developing States and the coastal areas (including large cities) of many countries are profoundly affected by rising seas. If we continue to unsustainably burn fossil fuels and belch additional carbon dioxide into the air, the world's temperature will continue to rise, thus elevating sea water and causing the forced displacement of potentially millions.

We ask at the June Oceans Conference that discussion include ways of heightening efforts to limit the burning of fossil fuels and accelerating efforts to comply with the Paris Agreement, striving not simply to hold the global temperature increase to 2 degrees above pre-Industrial levels, but to work towards keeping the increase at 1.5 degrees. Further, we ask that the Conference discuss means of supporting those affected by rising ocean levels through funding for adaptation and mitigation, including relocation. We also ask that discussions include finance for safeguarding coastlines.

PROTECTION: Oceans comprise about 70 per cent of Earth. According to the Marine Conservation Institute, only 3 per cent of ocean area is included in implemented and actively managed protected areas, and of that only 1 per cent is strongly protected in no-take marine reserves. This is an extremely small percentage when compared to the amount of preserved areas on land. Marine reserves and protected areas offer hope that fish and other marine life might be replenished, and that ecosystems may be preserved. There is a strong need for more marine reserves and protected areas within our oceans. We ask that this important topic be included in discussions at the June Oceans Conference.

PATROLS: The exclusive economic zones of some countries can be massive. And yet their ability to patrol those areas limited. Monitoring of marine reserves and preserved areas is vital for their survival. For this reason and because of serious overfishing as well as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, much greater patrol efforts on our oceans are needed.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, about 90 per cent of the world's stocks are fully or overfished. Meanwhile, production is set to increase by 17 per cent by 2025. The FAO's State of the World Fisheries Report indicates that overexploitation of fish has more than tripled since the 1970s. A significant number of popular fish are being harvested unsustainably. Billions of dollars are lost by illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The world cannot afford that income loss. More importantly, it cannot afford to jeopardize fish stocks which are a major source of food for many.

We ask that the June Oceans Conference consider greater funding for marine and air patrols which can address illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, as well as protect ecosystems and fish/marine stocks within marine reserves and protected areas. We further call for an end to subsidies for fishing, which merely serve to promote overfishing.

In summary, we ask that the June Conference on Oceans include discussions about the following:

1. Immediate global, collaborative efforts to cleanup ocean garbage gyres and other pollution
2. Stronger regulations related to the disposal of waste by fishing and other sea vessels
3. Greater limitations on agricultural, chemical, and other waste disposal at sea or from land to sea
4. A considerable increase in the number of designated marine reserves and protected areas
5. An increase in funding to provide patrols which could monitor and protect reserves and protected areas, as well as curb illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing
6. Greater data collection related to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing
7. An increase in prosecuting perpetrators of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing
8. The elimination of subsidies for fishing
9. Greater limits on the number of vessels which can fish
10. Increased studies on the effects of micro plastic on various species, including humans
11. Strong efforts to promote adherence to the Paris Climate Agreement, but working towards a more stringent limit of 1.5 degrees in temperature rise (to help curb the rise of ocean waters)

12. Assistance for climate-induced refugees who are affected by rising sea waters and more extensive planning for coastal areas which are and will be affected by rising sea levels.
13. A stronger and more cohesive system of universal laws, policies, and regulations designed to protect the ocean and marine life