

IOI President Address – 17 June 2022

Excellency Dr George Vella, President of Malta

Professor Alan Deidun,

Ms Antonella Vassallo,

distinguished organisers and participants,

I extend sincere congratulations for convening this event to award and engage young generations in the sustainable management of our Ocean planet. Ocean literacy and Citizen Science actions are a mainstay of the excellent work carried out by Alan, and an important sub-programme of the International Ocean Institute Malta Centre which he directs.

I also wish to convey the appreciation and gratitude of the global family of the International Ocean Institute to the Honorable President George Vella.

The Government of Malta, and the Maltese, have generously welcomed and hosted the IOI and its programmes over the first fifty years of its existence, building on the crucial legacy of Malta's

Ambassador to the UN, HE Arvid Pardo, together with IOI's founder Elisabeth Mann Borgese, in the establishment and ratification of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

This year 2022 sees us celebrating both the 50th anniversary of the IOI, as well as the 40th anniversary of the ratification of UNCLOS.

Honorable George Vella, in 1996 our founder Elisabeth Mann Borgese was disheartened by the way the Pardo principle of the Common Heritage of Humankind was being denied at international fora as the Ocean fell from the international development agenda.

The neglect of the Ocean and the sustainability of its living and non-living resources weighed heavily on Elisabeth's conscience. She strongly believed in the critical need for a new international focus that would motivate the international community to address challenges and threats to the Ocean under UNCLOS including through capacity building for developing countries.

Hence she sought your support to launch a historic initiative to which you whole heartedly responded. Through your envoy,

Ambassador Savior Borg, this support was in time to lead to Malta calling for the creation of an inclusive forum that would address any Ocean related challenges to the UN General Assembly.

Consequently, a unique UN Informal Consultative Process under UNCLOS was established by the General Assembly in 1998, eventually renamed the Open-ended Informal Consultative Process, which was open for all stakeholders' participation and which reported to the UN General Assembly on all matters of concern as to the sustainability and governance of the Ocean and the closely related problem of Ocean space as a whole.

As history records to your credit, the Ocean was in due time placed on the sustainable development agenda to bring to humanity's urgent attention its importance through the stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal 14 and the ongoing process for an internationally legally binding instrument for biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ).

Honorable President, you have made a valuable contribution to the hopes and aspirations of future generations, who deserve to inherit

a thriving and healthy Ocean and a Blue Planet. Your generous presence today is indicative of your passion and commitment for the environment and the Ocean on which on which all life depends.

We further express our deep gratitude to the Government of Malta, through your Excellency, for having been a generous host to the global head quarters of the International Ocean Institute in Malta over these last 50 years.

On behalf of the IOI, and most specially with our personal best wishes, please accept from IOI Managing Director, Antonella Vassallo, a modest token of our appreciation.

Thank you

Dr Awni Behnam

Former UN assistant Secretary General

Honorary President, IOI