

**53rd session of the IOC Executive Council
3–9 February 2021 (virtual session)**

Opening statement of the IOC Chairperson, Mr Ariel Hernán Troisi

1. Opening of the session

Esteemed delegates, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends.

It is a great pleasure for me to open the 53rd session of the Executive Council of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO. This is the first time that I have addressed you at a meeting of one of our governing bodies since being elected Chairperson in July 2019. Back then, I knew that exciting times were ahead, full of great opportunities for our ocean and our IOC, which I personally consider a tight-knit community which is extremely concerned and passionate about the ocean.

I had imagined the beginning of this meeting on many occasions, but none of the scenarios I had imagined involved the possibility of online participation. Circumstances have led us to a new normal and plunged us into the world of virtual platforms. Certainly, this has strengthened our communication, as well as our ability to participate in multiple subjects and debates. Nonetheless, this does not prevent me from missing being with you in person, sharing in the plenary, our conversations in the corridors and halls, and our informal chats at the end of the day.

Our Executive Council can be described as a marvellous communal space. It is a communal space because we have gathered in it regularly, and it is a marvellous space because we have done this regularly in both the good times and the difficult times. The unique circumstances which characterize this period have posed a challenge for us and demanded extraordinary determination. You, the Member States, our Secretariat and society as a whole have faced these challenges head-on.

I would like to express my gratitude to the IOC Member States for their guidance as to the direction of the Commission's work, the support they have given to the proposals formulated during these exceptional times and their trust, as well as for agreeing to hold this session remotely and with an agenda limited to key issues which require guidance or decisions before the 31st session of our Assembly.

Through constant consultation with the Officers and Secretariat of the IOC, we have carefully prepared in order to ensure the quality of the debate and to allow the decision-making process to be inclusive, transparent and effective, complying with our Rules of Procedure in full.

Even though at this point we know what it means to work with virtual platforms and, to use a nautical image, uncharted waters may remain, I have no doubt that our good practices and the traditional spirit of consensus, which characterize the work of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, will guide our virtual deliberations. I very much look forward to our debates.

Nevertheless, we must look towards the future and begin thinking about the next few buoys by which to steer our course. We need to find stable solutions to ensure that Member States are able to provide the Secretariat with effective and timely guidance regardless of the circumstances. I thus wish to propose that the Executive Council consider entrusting the Financial Committee, as part of its duties pertaining to IOC governance, methods of work and procedures, with the initial analysis of a review and possible updating of the Commission's Rules of Procedure. This would include the possibility of entrusting the Intersessional Financial Advisory Group with continuing this task in order to report at the 31st session of the IOC Assembly on the progress made.

Even under the present complex circumstances, the ocean still needs our attention, for we are a community specifically dedicated to the ocean and ocean-related activities. In recent years, the ocean has been attracting an increasing amount of attention in multiple forums and communities, making our role ever more critical to the sustainable development of our society, particularly as

regards the earth system. There is a growing need not only to produce knowledge and monitor the ocean, but also to inform the various interested parties adequately on the situation, the possible scenarios and our contributions as the IOC. The way to achieve our common goal is by establishing closer ties and promoting synergy with the private sector, industry, developers and technologists, young professionals in ocean-related fields, academia, and society as a whole.

It is also true that in recent years, the Commission's financial situation has proven challenging, but we have been able to cope thanks to the support of the Director-General of UNESCO, the support and contributions of the Member States, and the contributions of various donors and actors involved in ocean issues.

The IOC did not just suddenly materialize; it is the product of our shared effort and determination. Every year, we reaffirm our commitment to the ocean. We can execute our mandate and act as one for the benefit of all only if we continue to operate as we usually do: in a transparent, participatory and constructive manner, working together in order to be a better scientific and technical body.

From a personal perspective, I have benefited from the inspiration that comes with picking up the mantle from our previous distinguished Chairperson, Professor Peter Haugan of Norway. I have also benefited from the dedication and support of my Officer colleagues.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the tireless work of our Executive Secretary and his team. Their dedication and professionalism have allowed us to implement efficiently the decisions of our governing bodies and have created spaces conducive to our growth and to the successful accomplishment of our mission.

During this lengthy period between sessions, I have had the opportunity to participate in a great many events and forums, both in person and virtually, bearing the standard of the IOC and representing our 150 Member States.

I will not go through the entire list of events, since there was an average of one per week, but I will ask you to indulge me as I offer an example of their diversity by recalling some of the activities held.

Just over a month ago, we kicked off an unprecedented period, the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, for which we have set a series of objectives and expected results in order to respond to critical challenges. The Decade will allow us to lay solid foundations for a transformative process in sustainable ocean management which is based on improved scientific knowledge, in a holistic, transparent, inclusive and participatory context where no one is left behind.

On 31 December 2020, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted resolution 75/239, wherein it welcomes the preparatory work conducted by the IOC and notes with satisfaction the implementation plan for the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

I want to thank the members of the Decade's Executive Planning Group and our Secretariat for their dedication and hard work and for the high quality of the implementation plan which will be guiding us in our efforts to meet this challenge.

We have continued to develop our medium-term strategy (2022-2025), which will be discussed at this session, with a view to presenting it for consideration and approval at the next session of the IOC Assembly.

Following the decision of the 30th session of the Assembly, the IOC has actively participated in both Pre-COP 25, the Preparatory Meeting of the Twenty-Fifth Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), organized in Costa Rica, and COP 25 (the 25th Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, the "blue COP"), opportunities in which the connection between the ocean and the climate has played a starring role.

The restructuring of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has affected many of our activities. The intersessional work conducted before the first meeting of the Joint WMO-IOC Collaborative Board (JCB) has provided a starting point for strategic advice and co-design. I would like to give special thanks to the members of the JCB for the time and effort devoted this activity.

August 2019 saw the third session 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. In this domain, the IOC is recognized as a key organization in terms of capacity-building, access to and exchange of data and information, and the transfer of marine technology. One particular aspect of the IOC highlighted by some of the delegations in New York is its ability both to provide knowledge, products and services and to anticipate needs and identify real or potential opportunities. This is at once an acknowledgement of our work and a signal of new commitments which involve efforts in terms of human, financial and infrastructure resources and to which we must attend.

On 14 December, the Commission marked its 60th year in the service of the United Nations system and of the entire community. We organized a celebration through an online event which had very large attendance. The level of participation was yet another indication of the IOC's strategic positioning and the importance of its services, of which we can be proud. It also compels us to continue to do our utmost in striving towards the common good and towards the ocean we need for the future we want.

The anniversary celebration was also an opportunity to publicly present the second edition of the Global Ocean Science Report 2020 (GOSR-2020).

Among the multiple initiatives and endeavours undertaken, it is important to point out the advances made with regard to: the Ocean Data and Information System (ODIS); the Ocean InfoHub, a system of transfer of marine technology; the second phase of the OceanTeacher Global Academy (OTGA-2) and its network of training centres; and ocean literacy.

I would also like to mention in-person participation in: an event entitled *Governing Science at Sea: The Legal Framework for Marine Scientific Research* in Busan, Republic of Korea; an event in Lisbon, Portugal, to mark the 500th anniversary of Ferdinand Magellan's circumnavigation of the world; a UNESCO partners' forum in Panama; and, with the private sector, BlueTech Week in San Diego, United States of America.

I would like to welcome the new members elected in the Tsunami Early Warning and Mitigation System in the North-Eastern Atlantic, the Mediterranean and Connected Seas (NEAMTWS).

Millions of lives have been affected by the pandemic, and I would like to declare my solidarity with all the families which have suffered. I also wish to extend my deepest condolences to the loved ones of the distinguished individuals who participated in the work of the Commission and who passed away last year.

I ask all participants to observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of these great exponents of ocean science and of those who have died in the pandemic.