

Environment

Giving the oceans their due



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The need for good governance in any form of management system is nowadays universally acknowledged. Moving in lock-step with such a public sentiment, politicians are increasingly making pledges in support of good governance, with the oceans being no exception.

In fact, the European Commission itself embarked on the daunting mission of promoting a higher degree of ocean governance within international spheres, launching, at the World Ocean Forum held in Portugal last June 4-5, a public consultation across Europe on ocean governance.

In launching such a public consultation, European Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Karmenu Vella is quoted as stating that "if our oceans are not healthy, our economy falls ill. Global maritime challenges require global solutions. I am committed to working intensively to define Europe's role in international ocean governance, for a sustainable blue economy and blue growth."

In fact, in promoting its Blue Growth agenda, the European Commission has identified three pillars which it considers as pivotal in ensuring legal certainty and security in the future blue economy – marine knowledge, marine spatial planning and marine surveillance.

Against such a riveting narrative, enter the International Ocean Institute (IOI), which has anticipated the current ocean governance watershed by 40 years.

The IOI, an international NGO the current ocean governance watershed by 40 years. In fact, the IOI, an international NGO with focal points and international centres based in over 35 countries spanning all the continents and oceans, was founded by Elisabeth Mann Borgese in 1972 with a two-pronged mission: the promotion of the sustainable use of the oceans and to uphold and expand on the concept of the oceans as the common heritage of mankind, as enshrined in the International Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and to whose development the IOI was instrumental.

Other seminal initiatives embarked upon by the IOI include the organisation of the *Pacem in Maribus* conferences, held 31 times since the opening one held in Malta in 1970, and the publication for the past 20 years, in collaboration with the Dalhousie International Law School, of the *Ocean Yearbook*, which showcases major reviews and policy papers on the current issues facing the oceans today.

Most recently, the IOI joined a highly commendable initiative, captained by 'The Future Ocean', a Cluster of Excellence supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and comprising over 200 scientists hailing from different disciplines, and also featuring MARE, a popular periodical dedicated to marine issues – the World Ocean Review one.

The initiative is a sterling way of distilling all the hard-nosed scientific acumen about the oceans that we have in hand to a language which is easily comprehensible by policy-makers and the layman in general.

A landmark volume is released each year, with the full series being completely accessible online at no charge (www.worldoceanreview.org), with the fourth volume rolling off the press a few weeks ago.

This volume addresses themes linked to the sustainable management of our oceans, while previous issues addressed fisheries, the diverse array of non-



The 2015 class of the annual IOI regional ocean governance training course with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the University's Valletta campus after the awarding of the Elisabeth Mann Borgese medal to Mr Ban.

fisheries resources extracted from the sea and even a global stock-take of the status of the oceans. It is, well and truly, a laudable initiative which fosters a better understanding of our oceans and what is at stake through ongoing human activities.

governance, the IOI course programme is revised each year to keep abreast of these new developments. For instance, two ad hoc seminars were held during the course of this year's training programme – one focusing on the Sustainable Development

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Only four days ago, the Regional Ocean Governance Training Course on the Mediterranean, Black, Baltic and Caspian Seas, held annually in Malta for the past 11 years, came to an end, imparting, over the course of five weeks, the essentials of ocean governance to yet another crop of 18 mid-career professionals hailing from regions as diverse as Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Albania, Georgia, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and China.

The Malta training course, held jointly by the IOI and the University of Malta, is not the only one of its genre, with the IOI organising, for the past 35 years, a sister course in Halifax, Canada, and more recently in South Africa, Turkmenistan, Thailand and China.

In order to reflect the emergence of novel themes relevant to contemporary ocean

Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, in particular SDG 14, with key speakers hailing from the UNDP, GEF and other international institutions being invited to contribute, and another seminar focusing on Arctic issues.

The former seminar was hosted at *Dar l-Ewropa* in Valletta, under the patronage of the European Commission representation in Malta, and was opened through a video message delivered by the EU Commissioner himself.

Participants to this year's IOI course had a red letter day when last month they attended the presentation of the Elisabeth Mann Borgese (EMB) award to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the Valletta campus of the University of Malta.

The award was bestowed upon the Secretary-General in view of his steering

the process leading to the adoption of the SDGs by the United Nations at the Sustainable Development Summit last September and, in particular, for the inclusion of a distinct SDG exclusively dedicated to the oceans – SDG 14 (Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources for Sustainable Development).

Previous recipients of the same Award include Kofi Annan, former UN General-Secretary and Joseph Borg, former European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs.

As of 2013, the IOI also partnered up with the Faculty of Laws at the University of Malta in conceiving the Masters in Ocean Governance course, further entrenching ocean governance in the academic agenda.

Sylvia Earle, the eminent marine biologist and National Geographic explorer, could not have captured the spirit better when she stated that "fifty years into the future, it will be too late to do what is possible right now. We are in a 'sweet spot' in time, when the discussions we make in the next 10 years will determine the direction of the next 10,000 years".

Dr Earle's statement is essentially a strident call to empower future generations with the tools through which they can better manage the oceans and the resources they hold – the IOI, through its numerous training and publication initiatives, is well positioned to fulfil such an onerous task.

The IOI's commitment towards a more sustainable and equitable exploitation of the oceans' resources is encapsulated in Awni Behnam's (Honorary President, IOI) citation speech when bestowing the EMB Medal to Ban Ki-moon, namely the following excerpts:

"Mr Secretary-General, our oceans and seas have, for far too long, been over-exploited, abused and mismanaged to our peril and the peril of generations to come. In fact the health of our ocean has now become a protagonist of climate change issues. We commit to you to place capacity building and education for the achievement of SDG14 as a principle contribution towards meeting the challenge of climate change in the interest of current and future generations."

The ocean legacy foundations built by the IOI will live on...

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United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon signs the visitors' book at the University's Valletta campus in the presence of Pro-Rector Alfred Vella, IOI Honorary President Awni Behnam and IOI Managing Director Antonella Vassallo.