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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

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**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of World Oceans Day
*Innovation for a sustainable ocean***

8 June 2020

Every year, in late May and early June, UNESCO celebrates three major international days which are an important opportunity to consider together the three systemic pillars of climate change: biodiversity, the environment and the oceans.

This third day draws attention to a key issue: the oceans. They occupy most of the Earth's surface – 70% – to the point of giving our planet its unmistakable colour. As such, they are eloquent barometers of the state of the Earth's health: to observe them is to know where we stand.

In terms of climate, the warming and acidification of the oceans have harmful consequences on marine life and on land: there is of course the rise in water levels which threatens communities settled along the coasts and island States. There is also a risk that is even more worrying since it is systemic, and which will become a reality if the oceans are no longer able to perform the climate regulation function that they have long fulfilled.

As far as biodiversity is concerned, the diagnosis is even more alarming. Where life has taken root, where it has diversified and branched out, as well as where it remains largely unknown, it is, everywhere, profoundly threatened.

We are well aware of these interlocking and interacting crises, thanks in particular to the work of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year. We also know where we must act. However,

we still have to take stock of matters and mobilize widely in order to manage the inevitable and prevent the irremediable.

COVID-19 affords us this opportunity to come together and set up ambitious programmes of action. This is true for the climate; it is true for biodiversity; it is also true for the oceans, as the United Nations Special Envoy for the Ocean, Peter Thomson, explained a few days ago: “If there were ever a tide in human affairs that should be taken, this is it.”

As we enter the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, it is indeed our responsibility to seize this moment.

We must seize this moment, firstly, to learn more about these depths, which often remain largely unknown to us, and still hold many secrets that only we can reveal.

We must seize this moment, secondly, to give free rein to imagination and innovation, which we need in order to confront this worrying situation. This is why we have made innovation the theme of the celebrations of this international day.

We must also seize this moment to sound the alarm, perhaps more widely than we have done so far, because no technical solution can replace a widespread, personal understanding of the threats to the oceans, their mysteries and their beauty.

“I need the sea because it teaches me”, wrote the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, to whom the Pacific Ocean was so dear. On this World Oceans Day, I invite you to make the ocean your teacher, to learn from it and to act for it.