



Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary – NGO with special consultative status in the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations since 2013 and with the Department of Public Information since 2006.

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RSHM at the UN

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"Oceans not only contain the bulk of our planet's water supply, but also most of the immense variety of living creatures, many of them still unknown to us and threatened for various reasons..." (LS # 40)

"We cannot allow our seas and oceans to be littered by endless fields of floating plastic."

Pope Francis



In this special edition of *News from the UN* we focus on the **2nd UN Ocean Conference** which was held in **Lisbon, Portugal 27 June – 1st July**. After a two-year postponement due to COVID, some **4,000 delegates**, including many Heads of State and Government, attended the second Ocean Conference.. It was co-hosted by the Governments of **Kenya and Portugal** and focused on the theme **"Scaling up ocean action based on science and innovation for the implementation of SDG 14"**.

We were happy to have an **RSHM delegation** made up of **Sisters Manuela Queirós and M Julieta Mendes Dias (Portugal)** with **Sr. Virginia Dorgan (EAA) - our RSHM International JPIC Coordinator**. Also participating was **Sr. Kathryn Keigher IBVM** a JPIC colleague from England. We are happy to share reflections on their experience.

Manuela Queirós RSHM, and M Julieta Mendes Dias RSHM (Portugal)



Participating in the Oceans Conference held in **Lisbon from 27 June to 1 July** as the **NGO of the Institute of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary**, was a privilege and a responsibility.

The focus was on conserving and using oceans, seas and marine resources **in a sustainable way - SDG 14**. The goals to be achieved by **2030** are interdependent and every one depends on each of us: *"because only together can we save the oceans"*.

We cannot talk about the future without talking about the Ocean. We must *"Ensure good governance of the Ocean", "Manage marine resources", "Preserve marine wealth and its biodiversity"*. The needs of humanity today involve issues such as: *"Combating pollution", "Addressing climate change", "Marine safety and freedom of navigation", "the relationship between salt water (SDG 14) and fresh water (SDG 6), "the Blue economy" and "Youth"*.

It was very impactful to listen throughout the plenary sessions to the delegations of the countries present who expressed a strong awareness of the urgency to act to save the oceans. They said: *"We must move from fine words to practice."* *"Either we all act together or we are all lost"*. *"Humanity without the oceans is a dead humanity"*.

This awareness and willingness to act was revealed by the different organisations, namely by the youth who made a plea:

"We need to have young people on the front line to defend the oceans", "We have to deal with your bad actions", "We are open to act in defense and protection of the oceans, but we need help."

In the search for solutions, the **Atomic Energy Agency** stated, that this organisation, has the ability to use atomic energy for peaceful purposes both in human health and in releasing pollution from the oceans. Knowing the past helps to identify the harm and to reverse it.

We heard the **cries of the voiceless** through groups linked to the Church who have denounced the situation of the indigenous peoples, small in number and on the verge of extinction, who depend exclusively on the Seas, not only for economic and financial reasons, but also for the spirituality that links them to the Oceans.

The Oceans are sick. *"It is vital to reverse this situation"* the **Secretary General of the United Nations, António Guterres** said in his message, *"It is necessary to move from words to deeds"*.



Yes. As of today, a new stage of action on the oceans begins. More than 150 countries have approved the so-called **Lisbon Declaration: "Our oceans, our future, our responsibility"**. And, taking up the words of the President of our Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, we will also be able to say **"our passion"** so that, like Jesus Christ, we can say: **"I have come that they may have life, and life in abundance"** (Jn 10:10).

*Manuela Queirós RSCM,
M Julieta Mendes Dias RSCM*

Virginia Dorgan RSHM (EAA)

I was fortunate to attend the **UN's Ocean Conference** in late June. This is a new and important focus for me since the first goal of the **Laudato Si' Action Plan** is to respond to the cry of the earth and about 71 percent of the earth's surface is covered by water. The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the **United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)**.



I learned that problems in the Ocean are severe. For instance, there is **The Great Pacific Garbage Patch**, a home to an enormous swirl of plastic waste twice the size of Texas. There is "**ghost gear**" at the bottom of the Ocean, all kinds of debris, broken nets and garbage, left behind by fishers which kill the fish that get entangled in it. Another threat is **mining of the ocean floor** which will have some devastating impact on plants, animals and the environment, with economic benefit only for the few.



One solution: The **UN Global Compact** is a non-binding pact to encourage businesses and firms worldwide to adopt sustainable and socially responsible policies, and to report on their implementation. One of their goals is to collect the garbage before it gets from the rivers to the Ocean.

New ways of thinking:

There was talk of a Blue Economy, focused on the sustainable use, management and conservation of aquatic and marine ecosystems and descriptions of a Blue Society with care to include local people in the decisions, look for inequities and

keep native peoples in the front. And there are Blue Schools developing around the world. Within these new ways of thinking, there is action to transform garbage, trash and even clothing into useful products. This is called a circular economy.

In a side event there was a participatory dialogue sponsored by **Caritas Internationalis** and **people of Oceania**. A very moving speaker at this session was a first nations leader - **Theresa Ardler**, from an **aboriginal Australian family**. She spoke of living in a rural community at the ocean; getting food there; celebrating births and deaths there; praying there, filled with awe and power and majesty. In the community no one goes hungry. These voices, so close to nature, are silenced however, by big business looking for minerals and \$\$ from the Ocean.



Pedro Walpole, SJ, is a native Irish man who grew up on the banks of the Shannon River and has served for the last decades in small islands in the Pacific. He is passionate about the need for an economy of justice; "*the change must be now; we need to connect with the lives of others.*"

"Only in the heart do we feel this. I hope that this conference goes beyond words. I have heard grand speeches too often. We need action. We need to listen to the youth."

Let us unite around his words, more aware of the Oceans. Let us consider conservation as an investment in the future rather than restraint on current development.

Virginia Dorgan, RSHM



Fast Facts about the OCEAN

- Oceans cover close to three quarters of the Earth's surface, and contain 97% of the Earth's water,
- Between 2009 and 2018, the world lost about 14% of the existing coral reefs.
- The ocean represents 99% of the volume of living space on the planet
- The ocean absorbs about one quarter of the world's annual carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions but in doing so it becomes more acidic
- Increasing acidification is threatening marine life and limiting the ocean's capacity to moderate climate change
- 17 million metric tons of plastic entered the ocean in 2021

Some Helpful resources:

Short videos:

- ➔ [It's not a drop in the Ocean](#)
- ➔ [Oceans Conference closes with commitment to save the oceans](#)
- ➔ [The ocean gives us life: Save Our Oceans](#) : Sylvia Earles

Webinar

The Sea is Sacred: Religious Responses to Deep-Sea Mining. A virtual side event co-sponsored by the **NGO Mining Working Group**, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, the Greek Orthodox church VIVAT International and the Pacific Conference of churches. ➔ [Watch the 90 minute Webinar](#)