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UNESCO REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE OF OCEAN SCIENCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (2021-2030)

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REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE OF OCEAN SCIENCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (2021-2030)

OUTLINE

According to Article 3.2 of its Statutes and Rule 49.2 of its Rules of Procedure, the IOC prepares regular reports on its activities, which shall be submitted to the General Conference of UNESCO. The present report covers the period 2020-2021 and focuses on the main achievements in the preparation and implementation of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. This report was presented *in extenso* to the IOC Assembly at its 31st session (14-25 June 2021), as working document IOC/A-31/3.7.Doc(2).

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Introduction

1. Established in 1960 by Resolution 2.31 of the General Conference of UNESCO at its eleventh session, the IOC is a body with functional autonomy within UNESCO. The IOC promotes international cooperation and coordinates programmes in marine research, services, observation systems, hazard mitigation and capacity development in service of its 150 Member States. In December 2017, building on the efforts of IOC Member States and the IOC Secretariat, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030 (hereafter, the Decade). The Decade is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to deliver a step-change in the generation and use of ocean science. It will influence how countries invest and participate in science and innovation to embrace societal goals and align research investment to contribute to common goals including the 2030 Agenda.

2. The Decade commenced on 1 January 2021 and its implementation is being coordinated by the IOC Secretariat. This document summarizes key developments in 2020-2021 in the preparation and implementation of the Decade. The last six months of the year 2020 were marked by an extensive participatory phase of the Decade's preparatory process that took place over the period 2018-2020. Key milestones in this period were the comprehensive review, finalization and subsequent consideration of the *Decade Implementation Plan* by the United Nations General Assembly at its 75th session. This process led to the adoption by the General Assembly of Resolution A/RES/75/239 of 31 December 2020 that noted with appreciation the *Implementation Plan* and *inter alia* requested IOC of UNESCO to continue in its coordination role throughout the implementation phase in cooperation with United Nations Member States and other stakeholders.

Endorsement of Flagship Decade Actions

3. The Decade will achieve its impact through the implementation of Decade Actions that will be co-designed, implemented and resourced by partners around the world to meet 10 Ocean Decade Challenges. The successful roll-out of the first Call for Decade Actions (No. 01/2020) was launched on 15 October 2020 and closed on 15 January 2020. This first Call targeted large-scale, global or major regional programmes, as well as in-kind or financial contributions to the Decade, including support to coordination costs. The Call for Actions resulted in 215 programme submissions and 27 contribution submissions from partners in 53 countries. The submissions demonstrated a high understanding of and alignment with the Ocean Decade vision and mission. A wide variety of proponents submitted programmes for consideration including Member States, United Nations entities, research bodies and non-governmental organizations. A wide diversity of themes were addressed in the submissions, with a strong focus on ecosystem management and protection, ocean observations, sustainable ocean economy and the ocean-climate nexus. Capacity development was an integral component of the majority of submissions.

4. Following a comprehensive technical review of the submissions by the IOC Secretariat, two meetings of the Interim Decade Advisory Board were held in March and April 2021 to review and make recommendations on endorsement. On the basis of these recommendations, on 5 June 2021, the Executive Secretary of IOC and ADG/IOC endorsed 28 Decade programmes and 66 Decade contributions as the first set of flagship Decade Actions. In addition, six United Nations-led Decade Actions were registered. These Decade Actions were selected for their transformative nature, their solutions-oriented focus that will result in tangible contributions to sustainable development, and their commitment to Decade principles including co-design, inclusivity and diversity. The first set of the Decade Actions covers diverse themes including ocean science to support policy development in Pacific SIDS, ocean literacy, deep sea research and management, ecosystem management under multiple ocean stressors, underwater cultural heritage, ocean observations, coastal resilience, and fisheries. A series of cross-cutting programmes will actively work with the thematic and regional programmes to develop capacity, ensure inclusivity and diversity, and support co-design of future Decade Actions.

5. Of the flagship Decade Actions, four are being led directly by IOC programmes. An analysis carried out for the 53rd session of the IOC Executive Council concluded that the current set of IOC activities make a significant direct contribution to almost all initial Decade challenges. It also identified an opportunity for IOC to use the Decade as a unifying framework to deliver on its mandate, simultaneously contributing to the achievement of Decade outcomes. IOC's current contribution to the Decade includes two programmes related to ocean observations, a programme on ocean literacy and a programme dedicated to the sharing and accessibility of ocean science best practices. IOC programmes are also strongly involved in programmes related to ocean acidification and deoxygenation, and coastal resilience. The IOC Assembly, at its 31st session, approved the development and eventual registration of additional IOC contributions to the Decade related to data management and tsunami early warning systems.

Decade Governance and Coordination

6. The establishment of the Decade Advisory Board, which will be a strategic advisory body to the IOC Executive Secretary and Governing Bodies is ongoing. The Terms of the Reference for the Board were tabled and approved at the 31st session of the IOC Assembly (ref. IOC/A-31/3/7/Doc (1)). A call for nominations for expert members of the Board was subsequently launched in June 2021 via IOC Circular Letter 2848, with the establishment of the Board planned for in the third quarter of 2021.

7. With the commencement of implementation of the Decade, there is an urgent need for a fully resourced and functional Decade Coordination Unit housed within the IOC Secretariat. A revised analysis estimates that US $2-2.5 million will be needed annually for the operation of the central Decade Coordination Unit. The IOC has requested support from its Member States for resources in the form of extrabudgetary resources or seconded staff to build out the Decade Coordination Unit.

8. In accordance with the provisions of the Implementation Plan, different types of decentralized coordination structures including Decade Coordination Offices and Decade Collaborative Centres are being established that will provide support to the implementation of the Decade. A number of institutions and Member States have informally indicated their interest in hosting structures of this kind. Draft operational guidance for these types of structures – Decade Collaborative Centres and Decade Implementing Partners – were presented to and approved by the IOC Assembly at its 31st session last June and discussions with potential partners will continue in the coming months.

9. A conceptual framework for measuring progress throughout the Decade has been developed and is being built into a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system for the Decade. The Decade Coordination Unit, as well as the decentralized coordination structures will have responsibilities for implementing this system which will inform the production of regular progress reports on the Decade, as well as planned review processes.

Stakeholder Engagement

10. Several meetings of the UN-Oceans contact group for the Decade, and of the full UN-Oceans group, were held during this period. These meetings provided a forum for the IOC Secretariat to present the development of the Implementation Plan and seek feedback on specific issues contained in the draft Plan including the scientific framework of the Plan, the governance and coordination framework, and resource mobilization and financing modalities. Cross sectoral collaboration within UNESCO has been taking place throughout the period including: ongoing discussions on the synergies between the Ocean Decade and UNESCO's role in the United Nations Decade of Ecosystem Restoration being led by UNEP and FAO; initial discussions with the planning team of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages; and planning of analytical work and events with the World Heritage Commission marine programme.

11. During this period, approximately 25 National Decade Committees and a number of regional stakeholder groups emerged to coordinate Decade stakeholders and catalyse the development of

Decade Actions. The establishment of additional voluntary National Decade Committees will be encouraged throughout the Ocean Decade as a means of convening and engaging national stakeholders and facilitating national contributions to the Decade. Regional task forces/planning committees in the Arctic, Southern Ocean, Pacific, Western Tropical Atlantic and Mediterranean regions are convening regional stakeholders and triggering the development of regional action plans/programmes that will guide the development of Decade Actions.

12. The Informal Working Group (IWG) of Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOP) which was established by IOC in November 2019 was very active over this period and contributed actively to the Decade preparation and implementation activities. Planning of all events during this period took into account the need to ensure generational, geographic, gender diversity both in terms of participants and in terms of speakers, moderators, and panelists. In order to ensure gender diversity and mainstream gender equality in the implementation phase of the Decade, the Implementation Plan contains specific strategies to ensure that gender-related barriers are overcome in the planning and implementation of the Decade actions and in the establishment of governance and coordination structures. A programme submission led by the World Maritime University seeks to establish a specific action plan for ensuring gender inclusivity throughout the Decade.

13. The High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy (the “Ocean Panel”) was established in 2018 by 14 Heads-of-State and had made significant commitments to sustainable ocean management. The aims of the Ocean Panel align closely with those of the Ocean Decade and the Decade has a significant potential role to play in the generation of necessary knowledge to support the implementation of the Panel’s recommendations. The IOC Secretariat published a report entitled “Ocean Knowledge for a Sustainable Ocean Economy: Synergies between the Ocean Decade and the Outcomes of the Ocean Panel” (ref. The Ocean Decade Series, 17) to document the synergies between the Ocean Panel and the Ocean Decade. The report identifies the role of the Ocean Decade in contributing to the ambition of the Ocean Panel and identifies proposals for actions to develop a lean, reliable guiding framework to respond to emerging demands for robust ocean knowledge relevant to society and necessary for achieving a sustainable ocean economy.

Communications and Outreach

14. The official Decade website was launched in June 2019. Since then, the dedicated website http://oceandecade.org has been the main entry point for the Decade stakeholders worldwide. Between December 2020 and March 2021 approximately 48,298 visitors accessed the website (+191.39% compared to the same three-month period the year before) resulting in 149,995 page views (+137.56% compared to the same three-month period the year before). The first key pillar of the Decade Communications Strategy, the “Generation Ocean” Communications Campaign will be launched during the second half of 2021. The campaign strategy, brochure, website and presentation deck are available, and social media assets as well as media engagement materials will be prepared in view of the launch. The current website is undergoing a major upgrade to integrate the Global Stakeholder Forum – a significant online infrastructure that will facilitate exchange and partnerships between Decade stakeholders across the globe. The deployment of the Forum is planned for late 2021.

15. Several major launch events were held over the period to mark the start of the Decade. The “Brave New Ocean” virtual event, held on 3 February 2021 to launch the Ocean Decade, convened more than 15,000 viewers on its first broadcast. The event featured a number of founding members of the Ocean Decade Alliance including: H.E. Hon. Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya; H.E. Erna Solberg, Prime Minister of Norway; H.S.H Prince Albert II of Monaco; H.R.H. Princess Lalla Hasnaa of Morocco; and H.E. Hon. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa of Portugal. The high-level opening event of the First International Ocean Decade Conference was hosted by Germany on 1 June 2021 and will be followed by a series of seven “Ocean Decade Laboratories” from July 2021 to May 2022 that are structured around the seven Decade outcomes and which aim to convene partners in the development of the Decade Actions.

16. Egypt has offered to host a regional kick-off conference for Africa. Planning for this conference is underway with the involvement of colleagues from the IOC Sub-Commission for Africa and the Adjacent Island States. The conference will be held from 13 to 15 December 2021 in a hybrid format (virtual and in person). Thailand has offered to host a regional kick-off conference for Asia in November 2021. Planning for this conference is underway under the leadership of the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific.

Resource Mobilization

17. A major challenge for the IOC's small Secretariat, and the biggest risk to the success of the Decade, continues to be the lack of available resources. The Secretariat remains faced with the dual task of raising both the extrabudgetary resources necessary to maintain its core operational programmes and the significant additional resources required to lead and coordinate the Decade preparation phase. Until now, most of the funds have been provided through voluntary contributions of relatively short duration. The following Member States/organizations have made specific financial contributions to IOC to support Decade planning activities during this period: Belgium, Canada, China, Japan, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Sweden and REV-Ocean. A first private sector partner, Panerai, will contribute to the Decade's efforts by providing funding for a two-year project on ocean literacy.

18. Discussions are underway with several Member States to second additional personnel to the Decade Coordination Unit. Significant efforts are being made to engage philanthropic foundations via regular meetings of the Foundations Dialogue and efforts to engage private sector partners are being scaled up.

19. However, in order to achieve the Decade vision, a significant increase in the volume and type of financial and in-kind resources available will be required. Resources are needed for: (i) support to Decade Actions based on the results of regular resources needs assessments; (ii) support to Decade coordination within the Decade Coordination Unit, and through hosting of decentralized coordination structures; and (iii) support to IOC programmatic contributions to the Decade. A framework Resource Mobilization Strategy has been prepared for the Decade (ref. IOC/INF-1416) which sets out aspirational goals for resource mobilization and finalization and operationalization of this strategy is a priority for 2021. This strategy will detail efforts required to fulfil measurable goals for resource mobilization that are in line with the Decade's adopted approach of encouraging resource providers to align their resource allocation strategies with Decade priorities.

20. The Ocean Decade Alliance will be a key element of the resource mobilization efforts for the Decade. The Alliance – which was pre-launched as part of the Brave New Ocean event on 3 February 2021 – has been established to leverage and multiply financial and in-kind resource commitments towards the Decade. It is a network of eminent partners from governments, United Nations agencies, industry and philanthropy that will lead by example to catalyse support for the Decade through targeted resource mobilization, networking, and influence. Alliance members are listed on the Ocean Decade website and have been invited to join the Alliance both at the individual level (Ocean Decade Alliance patrons) and the institutional level. Sherpas are currently being identified for all members and a first operational meeting is planned in coming months. A high-level meeting of Alliance members is being considered for late 2021 or early 2022.

Future Perspectives

21. The next 12 months will be a critical period for the Decade in terms of ensuring global visibility and operationalizing the first series of endorsed Decade programmes that will form the first building blocks of the Decade, including population of these programmes with projects. It will also be crucial in terms of the establishment of fundamental operational elements of the Decade including the Decade Coordination Unit, decentralized coordination structures, the Global Stakeholder Forum, as well as the finalization of the Decade's result-based framework.

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