



INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION
(of UNESCO)

Twenty-Third Session of the Assembly
Paris, 21–30 June 2005

Agenda Item: 3.1

STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN ON THE STATE OF THE COMMISSION
(covering the biennium June 2003–June 2005)

In accordance with Rule of Procedure No.8.1(a), the Chairman deliver to the Assembly his statement on recent developments in the work of the Commission and perspectives for the coming years.

- 1 According to our eighth Rule of Procedure I am required to present to this Assembly a view on the state of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. In doing so I want first to pay a tribute to my fellow Officers, the five Vice-Chairmen who have each been active in pursuing their designated areas of responsibility. We have met on four occasions, most recently in Tunisia in February. Our role has been to give advice and guidance to the Executive Secretary and to plan meetings of the Governing Body including this Assembly. At these meetings we benefit from the wise advice of the immediate past Chairman, Su Jilan. In planning the agenda for this Assembly we have identified issues of major importance, particularly those where a decision is required. I will begin by reminding you of some of these.
- 2 Without doubt the event which has most impacted the IOC in the past two years has been the Indian Ocean tsunami of 26th December 2004. Work is still in progress to establish a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean, drawing on experience of the Pacific Ocean Warning System. It is right that we give priority to this. But we must remember that there are other oceans where tsunami might occur; and there are other ocean hazards, including storm surges, for which in some areas warning systems have yet to be established.
- 3 Some of the longer-term more insidious potential ocean hazards are being addressed through the well-focussed IOC Science Programme. The paper prepared by the Secretariat for your information shows that we have targeted the coastal zone, algal blooms, ocean carbon dioxide, and climate research. Where possible IOC works with appropriate partners. One of the issues for this Assembly is our continuing involvement in these partnerships, including the World Climate Research Programme, at a time of financial stringency. Here I should refer to the progress towards setting up a regular process of Global Marine Assessment. The IOC has already declared itself willing to take on a leading role provided that additional resources are identified. At the meeting in New York in March 2004 I was elected, as the IOC representative, to chair the Expert Group of national and agency representatives that prepared more detailed proposals. Discussions continue among Member States on the extent and timing of the GMA process.
- 4 To reinforce our collaborative efforts, we have also recently signed agreements with ICES and with the UNEP Regional Seas Programme. The links with ICES specifically include data management and exchange. We will be receiving a report on the May 2005 meeting of IODE in Oostende, and the opening of the IODE Project Office there. Links with the Census of Marine Life are encouraging, particularly the CoML's development of a biological database, Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS).
- 5 The development of the Global Ocean Observing System and its potential involvement in the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) will be discussed at this Assembly. There are outstanding issues that we must resolve. These include the terms of reference for the working of the intergovernmental GOOS panel, and relationships between GOOS and the GOOS Regional Alliances. I urge Member States to make progress on these issues at this Assembly. Next September the IOC-WMO Joint Technical Commission for Oceanography and Marine Meteorology (JCOMM) will hold its second meeting in Halifax, Canada. Preparations are well advanced and we will be hearing about these: JCOMM is a very important mechanism for the implementation of many IOC programmes.
- 6 At your request a paper has been prepared on Modalities of Implementation of IOC Programmes in Regions. There are encouraging regional activities of which we will hear more, but the development of more vigorous regional programmes must depend on the resources and commitment of Member States. We will also be considering the new IOC Strategy for Capacity-Building, an important blueprint for an area of essential growth in our work. I must also mention the important progress made by the Advisory body on the Law of the Sea — IOC/ABE-LOS —

in formulating recommendations for the application of Article 247 of UNCLOS on marine scientific research projects undertaken by or under the auspices of international organizations.

7 The IOC continues to operate a limited number of effective targeted programmes. In representing the IOC the Officers have become increasingly aware of other examples of growing popular and political awareness of the importance of the sea. Ideally IOC should also be developing projects to address these. Last October I was invited to lead an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) workshop in Chile on the contribution of marine activities to national economies; for many countries these are often substantial and sometimes unrecognised. One of the continuing roles of IOC is to promote international cooperation in the science and services that underpin these various economic activities. During this Assembly you will hear of many impressive achievements by our Commission. Nevertheless there is no doubt that much more could be achieved if the IOC resources were commensurate with its responsibilities.

8 When the Officers of the IOC met recently we were made aware of the proposals contained in the initial draft Programme and Budget (33 C/5) for UNESCO whereby in common with many other areas, there will be substantial reductions in UNESCO allocations to IOC for the biennium 2006–7. For us these will be in the region of US\$ 900,000 over the biennium. Some identified priority areas in UNESCO have been spared the general cuts, but IOC is not in that favoured category. We have written to the Director-General on your behalf about this. While we must do all we can to protect the level of these “in-house” resources, it will also be essential to identify and actively implement substantial alternative additional sources of funding. If this is not done, the work of our Commission will be severely limited. Vice-President Captain Javier Valladares, responsible among the Officers for programme and budget, has prepared a paper on a range of possible mechanisms for attracting substantial extra funding: the Officers asked him to include a range of options which at one extreme could lead to increased autonomy for IOC as a separately funded Commission, and at the other extreme could reduce the IOC to an intergovernmental debating forum on oceanographic issues.

9 Our Statutes require us to promote international cooperation and to coordinate programmes in research, services and capacity building. We do this in order to learn more about the nature and resources of the ocean and coastal areas and to apply that knowledge to the improvement of management, sustainable development, the protection of the marine environment, and the decision-making processes of our Member States. Basically the IOC is a mechanism to facilitate cooperation among Member States. We have seen how important that mechanism can be in the responses to the recent horrific tsunami.

10 It is up to us all, as representatives of our Member States to work together to make the IOC increasingly effective in all our areas of responsibility, and enable us to realise much needed mutual benefit.

11 What then is the “State of the IOC”? In brief, we have ongoing achievements and programmes of which we can be justly proud. Much more can and needs to be done. However, unless additional resources are identified, even our existing activities are increasingly vulnerable.

12 On behalf of all the Officers I welcome you, and wish for us all a productive 23rd Assembly.