



Blue Talk – Manchester, 28th March 2022

Manchester Cathedral and the Consulate General of Portugal in Manchester organized a Blue Talk, on the 28th March, in the framework of the preparation of the 2nd UNITED NATIONS OCEAN CONFERENCE that will take place in Lisbon, in late June, co-hosted by Portugal and Kenya.

The Blue Talk was hosted by the Dean Rogers Govender. The speakers were Duarte Bué Alves (Consul General of Portugal), Councillor Tracey Rawlins (City Council – Executive Member for Environment) and Alex Kennedy (Former Member of the Youth Parliament). Ambassador Peter Thomson, UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, delivered the closing remarks (by video). Sterling was the media partner of this event.

Context:

The ocean is of critical importance to our planet: according to the OECD, its economic input is currently around 1.5 trillion USD (2.5% of the world gross value added). But the environmental dimension is not less important, as the ocean provides 50% of the oxygen we breathe, 20% of the proteins we consume and absorbs one third of the CO₂ the planet produces.

The threats, however, are paramount: climate change is heating the ocean (with subsequent sea level rise), pollution (namely plastic) is growing at unprecedented rates and overfishing is threatening stocks. Despite these, some significant progress has been made in the last years: the Paris Agreement; the various COP's; Agenda 2030 and the FAO Agreement on Ports are a few examples.

Some Key-Ideas

As the interventions and subsequent Q&A unfolded, some key ideas emerged as the main pillars of Manchester contribution to the 2nd UN Ocean Conference. These ideas evolved around the central **concept of sustainability** and the need to **build forward better, greener, and bluer** (and not just *build back better* in a post pandemic context).

Councillor Rawlins highlighted the relevance of **environmental education** as a game-changer. She underlined how committed the City of Manchester is in playing that card, making schools and teachers part of this process. She mentioned how relevant the

ocean is, **even to a non-coastal city like Manchester**. This is particularly important as it helps to mitigate the idea that the current debate is only pertinent to coastal countries and cities. She gave concrete examples about how Manchester is working on a blue agenda, namely the transportation of goods and persons via its canals or the fight against single-use plastic.

Alex Kennedy gave us a personal view on **how her generation is particularly concerned and involved in environmental issues**. She explained how sustainability is, therefore, not just a fashionable social movement but a precondition for all economic activities, as millennials and generations Z consumers will not accept otherwise. The UN Youth Forum is a decisive moment for this engagement. Based on her own experience as an activist and having participated herself in COP26, Alex Kennedy explained that **no gesture is too small, and every single contribution helps to make the difference**.

As no-one is an island, the importance of **partnerships** was also mentioned as a very relevant tool to bring people together and make sure no-one is left behind.

The **inextricable nexus between ocean and climate change** was also raised, as the climate topic is one of the most urgent problems that we must deal with. We can't forget the importance of **protecting biodiversity**, as part of this triple nexus ocean-climate-biodiversity. Several concrete examples of habits of our daily life were mentioned. Given the current geopolitical context in Europe, the **energy transition** process was also raised as a challenge that must be addressed.

As **mutual learning** is crucial, the leading role of Portugal was mentioned as a pioneer in maritime affairs (e.g., Framework Law on Maritime Spatial Planning; Ocean Satellite Account), as it has been recognized by several international organisations.

Science and innovation, major themes of the UN Ocean Conference, were also alluded to, as part of the road to Lisbon towards **deeper knowledge** as the basis for sustainable blue economy (namely coastal tourism and its challenges).

It was clear from the interventions and the relevant contribution from the audience that the 2nd UN Ocean Conference, in Lisbon, is seen as an **overarching event** and the must-go moment in what comes to the fulfilment of **SDG14 and Agenda 2030**. Efforts must be redoubled to make it an ambitious call for action and a decisive step based on science and political will.

Manchester, April 19th

The Dean of the Cathedral



The Consul General of Portugal in Manchester



