

Your Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I would like to tell you my pleasure to be among you today here in this beautiful place, the Westin Costa Navarino.

And I cannot resist the pleasure of recounting this legend which some of you are undoubtedly familiar.

Dionysus, the famous God of wine and pleasure, boarded a boat one day bound for the Island of Naxos. He took on the appearance of a young mortal that day so as not to draw the sailors' attention. However, during the voyage, he overheard their conversation: they were planning to sell him as a slave in Asia./..

Enraged, Dionysus exacted his revenge: he changed the oars of the boat into snakes, had grapevines grow on the deck

which then took over the whole boat, and the sound of flutes appeared from nowhere. Panic-stricken by these prodigious tricks, the sailors leapt into the sea.

They would have drowned had Poseidon, the god of the sea, not decided to welcome them to his kingdom, by turning them into dolphins.

However, this was on one condition: from then on, they would help anyone in danger at sea.

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This story, of which various versions exist of course, recounts two essential aspects. It recounts the closeness – even familiarity, which unites human beings and dolphins – and through them all marine mammals. And it also foretells

that our salvation, one day or another, will depend on these species.

I would like to talk about these two references and that is why I am delighted to have the opportunity of taking the floor.

Let me thank the organizers - the International Conference on Marine Mammal Protected Areas and the World-Wide Fund for Nature Greece, as well as the Greek authorities of course who are acting as our hosts.

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The fact that this conference is being held for the first time in Greece and in the Mediterranean is not only an opportunity to evoke the wealth and beauty of the myths of Ancient Greece. It is also a unique opportunity to place greater focus on the specific situation of the marine mammals of this highly important and fragile sea.

It will provide an opportunity, I hope, to improve their situation, both in the Mediterranean and elsewhere.

We are aware of the figures concerning species which are becoming increasingly endangered, the status of stocks which are diminishing, especially for some species – such as the monk seal in the Mediterranean.

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Above all, we are aware of the many dangers faced by these vulnerable species.

They are essentially the result of human activities which are increasing, as our society inevitably appropriates the seas, coastlines and ocean floor.

Urbanization disrupts the ecosystems, destroys habitats and increases pollution.

Sea traffic increases the risk of collision with boats and also generates pollution, both material – through degassing and the release of waste – and noise. Noise pollution to which marine mammals are particularly sensitive.

Fishing sometimes creates an imbalance in the food chains and too often results in incidental catches, sadly an ever-increasing occurrence.

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And climate change increases the pressure on these species – as it does on the whole of biodiversity.

All these factors often have dramatic consequences on these animal populations and contribute to their deterioration.

However, irrespective of the responsibility of any one factor, we cannot ignore the fact that it is always human activity which weighs on marine mammals, and which is largely responsible for their current situation – such as the

dolphins and cetaceans we are seeing more and more frequently being washed up on our shores.

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Yet these animals are close to us. They share many characteristics with us. They are intelligent and altruistic, and sometimes even more altruistic than us, as they come and save humans, whilst we leave whales, dolphins and seals to die.

There is an irony to this story: such intelligence is the cause of some of their misfortune, as it justifies several particularly harmful human activities.

I am thinking of dolphinariums and shows featuring these animals. We now know how incompatible these shows

are with the needs of the species on display. We are also aware of the ill-treatment which too often accompanies them and of the illegal trade they generate.

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I am of course referring to the recently reported scandals, where whales, killer whales and beluga whales were found in captivity. Sometimes they are unweaned babies separated from their mothers, and kept in cruel conditions.

From fishing nets to dolphinariums, from land pollution to the noise of boats, the threats hanging over marine mammals are on the increase.

These species which are so close to us, these species that mythology presented as sisters of the human species, are today in jeopardy.

We have an obligation to protect them, something which is only achievable through firm, determined and ambitious action.

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This action first and foremost requires targeted initiatives.

Initiatives at the level of States and political authorities, of course. In this context, it is important to continue to heighten the awareness of the States currently responsible for some of the direct tragedies I spoke about, so that they implement more stringent regulations.

I am thinking, for example, of the country whose withdrawal from the International Whaling Commission's moratorium last December, poses a problem and which would be held in higher esteem were it to clarify its position in regard to the protection of cetaceans despite a local tradition of which we are all aware.

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I am also thinking of dolphinariums which need to be managed more effectively.

I am thinking of the trade networks that supply them, where the scandals I mentioned just now came to light. Moreover, many of the businesses implicated supply dolphinariums that are in Asia where the price of the animals is worth millions of dollars.

In this respect, I believe that the authorities need to take a firm stand which should lead to concrete measures for these animals. However, mammals in captivity are sadly not the only ones to suffer from the negligence, irresponsibility and cruelty of humankind.

The havoc wreaked by fishing nets is another well-known cause. Yet we increasingly have the ability to prevent this, in particular by using acoustic deterrents and fish net markers, which must be brought into widespread use.

In this regard, I believe it is essential to work with the fishing industry, the majority of whose stakeholders are in favor of such precautions. But we must also ensure we have the necessary resources for such policies, by developing a binding legal arsenal, and more importantly by implementing proper monitoring.

However, the direct injuries inflicted by certain fishing techniques on marine mammals are unfortunately not the only thing making them vulnerable. Other elements, which I mentioned, also have extremely adverse effects on their health and their survival. In particular, all types of pollution and the degradation of the ecosystems.

These phenomena are obviously more difficult to address.

They need to be clarified. That is why scientific knowledge, as is often the case, needs to be our first ally.

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That is why I welcome for example the exhaustive inventory of cetaceans undertaken in the Mediterranean last

year by the ACCOBAMS agreement whose secretariat is based in Monaco and which will continue this summer in certain Mediterranean countries.

That is why I am delighted that my Foundation has been supporting various programs focused on marine mammals for several years, including the monk seal, for which we will sign an MoU at this Conference, which will provide us with more resources to protect this emblematic and endangered species of the Mediterranean.

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That is why we also support, via our Canadian branch, a research initiative focused on the St Lawrence beluga whale. Conducted by a consortium of private laboratories and academics. Its purpose is to gain a better understanding of the

beluga whale by studying its behaviour and habitat, and monitoring its state of health. But also, to offer support to stray or live stranded belugas, and to promote public awareness and appreciation.

Beyond any specific population, knowledge, and above all awareness of the great damage we are inflicting on marine mammals should prompt us into adopting broader conservation measures.

Obviously, these include marine protected areas which feature on the agenda of this Conference.

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The benefits of marine protected areas vis-à-vis marine mammals have, I believe, long been proven. We have seen this in the Mediterranean, for example in the Pelagos Sanctuary, created in 1999 by the Principality of Monaco, France and Italy: this area covering close to 88,000 km² – the first trans-border area in the Mediterranean – is currently

home to many marine mammals, including twelve species of cetacean.

We have also witnessed this in other sanctuaries that have been established across the globe, in particular in the Southern Ocean and the South Atlantic. And this has been confirmed more widely in all marine protected areas which have been set up over the last few years.

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That is why we need to develop and strengthen them, by imposing greater control of their delineation in order to guarantee their efficiency.

The very term of marine protected area, as we know, covers very different realities, as shown, for example, by their breakdown into seven categories by the IUCN.

CBD COP 15, which is taking place next year in China will, I think, provide an opportunity to clarify these objectives and strengthen the resources intended for MPAs. However, this meeting requires preparation: this is also one of the challenges of this Conference.

In addition to multilateral agreements, other strategies can be developed for the expansion of marine protected areas.

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National strategies, through the development of initiatives in waters under national jurisdiction.

Multilateral strategies, involving a certain number of negotiations, such as the ones we are conducting at the moment at the UN on biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions.

Strategies also involving private stakeholders, through the development of appropriate tools, such as the Trust Fund

we have set up in the Mediterranean with France and Tunisia, and whose purpose, with public and private funds, is to promote the development of marine protected areas and their networks.

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It is the combination of these levels, of all these stakeholders involved and of all these resources which will enable us to progress quickly and efficiently.

But it is also the mobilization of other resources and other players. In this respect, I would like to stress the fact that these mammals are often indicators of the general condition of our seas. And that to save them, we need to save our seas.

We need to protect them from plastic pollution, which is currently one of the most serious harms they face, and which contaminates the entire food chain.

We need to protect them from overfishing, which is destroying entire ecosystems and depleting certain seas of their life.

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We need to protect them from global warming, which is seriously jeopardizing the entire marine environment. I hope that the IPCC's interim report devoted specifically to the oceans and the cryosphere, the initial project of which was put forward by my Foundation and which will be presented in Monaco in a few months' time, will provide additional tools.

We all need to take action to save the oceans, to save their ecosystems, to save their fauna and to save their marine mammals.

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This is the meaning I would like to give to the story I told you about Dionysus at the beginning: the vocation of these species to which we are so close, to which we are naturally so sensitive, is indeed to save us.

To save us by encouraging us to further protect our seas, one of the key challenges of this century.

To save us by prompting us to change our attitude in regard to our environment. To demonstrate inventiveness, determination and responsibility.

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In doing so, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ancient poet Oppian of Corycos, well-known here, when he wrote that *“the hunting of dolphins is immoral and whoever willingly devises destruction for dolphins can no more draw nigh the gods, [...] for equally with human slaughter the gods abhor the deathly doom of the monarchs of the deep, [...]”*.

Thank you.