

Event: Opening Ceremony of the “Multilateral Environmental Agreements Day, Wednesday, 28 February at 09:00 in Conference Room 1.

SUSAN GARDNER FINAL SPEECH

Excellencies, delegates, colleagues,

It’s a privilege to be here today at the opening of MEA day,

- a time to reflect on the strength of cooperation
 - across our multilateral environmental agreements.

- And there is no more poignant example of the need for cooperation,
 - than our ocean
 - where our **Regional Seas Conventions** have been among
 - our most powerful and long-standing tools,

Let me take you back for a moment, in the history of multilateralism,

Even before UNEP’s founding,

- when ocean pollution was already making headlines.

In the late 1960s,

- There was international news of **30 million gallons** of crude oil on the English coastline
 - because of a sinking oil tanker,
 - and reports of California beaches covered with tar from **offshore drilling**

- **50 years ago, in 1974**, just two years after UNEP’s establishment,
 - the 2nd session of the **Governing Council**,
 - launched the **UNEP Regional Seas Programme**,
 - which continues to be one of our most foundational achievements for coastal and marine cooperation;

- Those early ambitions, led to the **first** Regional Seas Convention
 - in **1974**: the **Helsinki Convention**,

- until the most recent adoption of the **18th** Regional Sea Convention,
 - in **2003: The Tehran Convention.**

Our 50-year long history of Regional Seas

- has brought together more than **146** countries
- with the shared understanding that what happens in one region of the ocean,
 - extends far beyond its origins and affects us all,

For me, this is personal...

I started my career as a young scientist in the 1990's,

- studying sea turtles in Bahia Magdalena, Puerto San Carlos,
 - a remote fishing village on the Pacific Coast of Mexico,

One day, a fisherman handed me a flipper tag from a loggerhead turtle,

That tag had two markings, an ID number, and the word "Okinawa",

That fisherman, held in his hand,

- the first proof of the transpacific journey of loggerhead sea turtles
- from **Japanese nesting beaches to Mexican feeding grounds,**
 - 10,000 km away

This was my first personal experience with the interconnections across our ocean,

- that the health of sea turtle populations in Latin America,
 - depends on habitat protection in Asia,

The Regional Seas have played an extraordinary role in combatting global crises:

On **pollution,**

- For example in the **Mediterranean, the Barcelona Convention**
- has helped implement regulations on single-use plastic bags
 - across **17 Mediterranean countries.**

For **Biodiversity,**

- In the **Caribbean, the Cartagena Convention**
- has helped to designate over **50,000 square km** of marine protected areas since 2010,

For **Climate,**

- along the Kenyan Coast, under the **Nairobi Convention,**

- the 'Go Blue' project is protecting and restoring 2000 hectares of mangroves,
- storing more than **30,000 tonnes of CO2** per year,

As platforms for cooperation, the Regional Seas Conventions with their Action Plans

- are powerful engines for implementation existing global commitments,

And now, of course, they are poised and ready

- to support member states with swift actions to **ratify the BBNJ Agreement**,
 - And accelerate readiness for its implementation

To conclude,

As we celebrate the **50th anniversary** of the establishment of

the UNEP Regional Seas Programme,

- we can reflect on all that we have learned about working together for ocean governance.
- the Regional Seas Conventions have created the connections between
 - global commitments, regional context and local knowledge;
- Knowledge that comes from **generations of living on the sea**,

Like that fisherman in Mexico,

- Despite all of our sophisticated technology of satellites tracking sea turtle migration,
- that fisherman in Bahia Magdalena,
 - was probably the first to know about the connection between
 - Okinawa and Puerto San Carlos.

That fisherman understood the importance of our ocean for food, health and livelihoods,

- That fisherman understood that **with** cooperation, a rising tide, lifts all boats.

The **Regional Seas Conventions** were designed to embrace the local and regional strengths,

- by working together in a spirit of support and cooperation,
- And today we **celebrate 50 years of their enormous contributions**.

Thank you.