Towards a Universal Declaration of Ocean Rights (UDOR)

Concept Note
What is the ultimate goal?

To achieve the passage of a Universal Declaration of Ocean Rights by 2030.

The aim of a Universal Declaration of Ocean Rights is to create a shared global vision of positive human-Ocean relationships and give the Ocean a voice and representation within a multinational governance system.

2023 Objective:

As a first step, Cabo Verde, with the support of Monaco, and by building upon the SIDS Coalition for Nature, are leading the introduction of language in this year's omnibus resolution on "Oceans and Law of the Sea" to urge further dialogue on Ocean Rights and its inclusion in upcoming agendas of the United Nations. The expected draft omnibus resolution will be circulated ~July 2023 and new proposals will likely be examined at the end of September. The Government of Cabo Verde and partners aim to garner a unified front of UN Member States to propose and request further exploration of the concept of Ocean Rights within the formal dialogues and mechanisms of the United Nations (including the next UN Ocean Conference, Summit of the Future, the SIDS Summit, and in dialogues within UN agencies and institutions).

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1 Omnibus Resolutions are more detailed and longer than regular Resolutions. They can cover many different issues in one document and provide more specific information about a specific topic. They usually support existing processes and Resolutions but often call on states/governments to take additional actions. Just like Resolutions, Omnibus Resolutions can be used by different bodies of the UN and for a variety of issues/topics. More at Alana Capell, What is an Omnibus Resolution?, Child Rights Resource Center, available at: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/what-omnibus-resolution/. Every year, the General Assembly adopts a resolution entitled “oceans and the law of the sea” e.g. N2300478.pdf (un.org)
What is the process?

The initiative was launched in March 2022 by The Ocean Race, Earth Law Center, Nature’s Rights and the Municipality of Genova. Together, they are creating a platform to enable and support action towards Ocean Rights, namely by facilitating an inclusive process for stakeholder input and collaboration while initiating dialogue to gain support from governments.

The Government of Cabo Verde endorsed this input process, that currently entails:

- The Ocean Race Summits: a current series of 12 Summits (2019-2023) helping to drive new and improved policies around the major issues affecting the Ocean: lack of governance, lack of protection, and climate change, while also exploring Ocean rights. The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres attended the Summit in Mindelo, Cabo Verde on January 23, 2023.
- “The Genova Process:” a series of 8 global workshops (named for its home in Genova, Italy) with the purpose for stakeholders across all areas of expertise and geographical representation to provide advice to the collective strategy and process, ensure solidarity and synergy with existing Ocean governance regimes and global environmental objectives, and contribute to draft principles underpinning Ocean Rights. Summary reports are developed from each workshop and available here. (2022-2023; remaining workshops to be held on May 4th, June 2, and June 7-8, 2023).
- Two high level roundtable discussions with government representatives at the Monaco Representation to the United Nations. The first held in September 2022 during the UN General Assembly, with H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco giving their support to the initiative, and the second one held with the Group of Friends of Ocean and Seas in January 2023.
- One Blue Voice petition: a public facing campaign gathering support for Ocean Rights (www.onebluevoice.net) by inspiring all citizens of the world to sign an online petition (over 15,000 signatures so far) to show global leaders that citizens around the world demand the recognition of the inherent rights of the Ocean.

Much will need to be completed not only through 2023, but also 2030. Our strategy further entails:

- Gathering a large group of Small Island Development States (e.g. SIDS Coalition for Nature), and other member states to support the omnibus resolution on “Oceans and Law of the Sea” (September 2023).
- Outlining principles underpinning Ocean Rights to be presented alongside the United Nations 2023 General Assembly at The Ocean Race Summit (September 18th 2023).
- Publishing a scientific peer-reviewed paper to serve as a background document to argue for the purpose, value and viability for Ocean Rights.
- Exploring the creation of an Ocean Rights Alliance with supporting governments, NGOs, foundations, and compliant private sectors, to support this movement.
How can you support?

Movement building is never accomplished alone. We welcome partners who want to provide expertise and collaborate on strategy.

The government of Cabo Verde is championing this initiative, with support from other national governments, including Seychelles, Monaco, and municipal and local governments including Genoa, Italy. We actively seek further governmental support and new partners across sectors, and would welcome collaboration that would be agreeable to your capacity and interest to this end.

Opportunities to contribute in this initiative include, but are not limited to:

1. Providing political support for the initiative by identifying Points of Contact;

2. Proactively supporting the ambition to further explore the concept of Ocean Rights within the formal agendas and dialogues of the United Nations, such as:
   a. the United Nations Ocean Conference,
   b. the Summit of the Future, and
   c. relevant UN Agencies, Processes and Institutions;

3. Referencing Ocean Rights in the country’s speech to the UNGA 2023;

4. Profiling Ocean Rights in own and others side events during the UNGA, at upcoming Conference of the Parties and other occasions; and

5. Exploring options for profiling and incorporating Ocean/Nature’s rights in national policies.
Why is this necessary?

Ocean Rights is an innovative and comprehensive approach that brings together natural, cultural and social values to guide our activities, interests and behaviours as they relate to the Ocean. This in practice means an oscillating balance between human interests and activities with respect to the needs of the Ocean: in simple terms, a positive human-Ocean relationship. In turn, this leads to the greater fulfillment of human rights, which directly rely on a healthy and resilient Ocean now and into the future. Ocean Rights stems from the Rights of Nature movement, now emerging in over thirty countries, but with specific application and attention to the supranational nature of the ocean policy seascape.

The underlying philosophy of Ocean Rights is thus: Humans exist as a part of Nature within an inextricable and complex web of relationships, and as a result, human rights are embedded within and dependent upon the health, integrity and functioning of the Ocean, physical systems, ecosystems, species and constituting elements. Indirect drivers of policy, including values and norms, are just as important leverage points to address systemic issues such as the climate crisis as direct drivers, such as exploitation. How we value the Ocean is tightly linked to how society will manage our activity in the marine environment.

Therefore, shifting values of the Ocean based upon human benefit and utility towards recognizing the Ocean as a complex living being, and our source of life with intrinsic value can help prevent overexploitation and irreversible harm. When humankind exploits the Ocean, there comes reciprocal responsibilities and obligations to protect and preserve the marine system and environment long-term.

Therefore, the initiative to introduce Ocean Rights in the UN Agenda is one of strengthening UNCLOS, by underlining our increasingly shared understanding of an ecologically sustainable human-Ocean relationship and how we can respect it. We imagine this new values-based foundation (or code of conduct) as an all-encompassing platform of principles to then inform and provide consistency and coordination (rather than fragmentation and a siloed approach) to the implementation of all the related Ocean agendas that exist, such as UNCLOS, UNFSA, UNESCO, FAO, IMO, ILO, SDG14, and many others.
Looking forward:

We welcome strategy input and collaboration to reach these ongoing milestones:

- **2022 - 2023**: Host 4 more Summits to raise awareness on the topic of Ocean Rights among key stakeholders and become a key Global Forum for Ocean issues.
- **2022 - 2023**: Secure commitments calling for the need of a Universal Declaration from at least 10 countries.
- **2023**: Through the Genova Process, establish a drafting committee and present a Roadmap to 2030 to the United Nations.
- **2023**: Inclusion of language to the United Nations General Assembly Omnibus Resolution.
- **2024 - 2029**: Develop shared values and texts for Ocean Rights.
- **2030**: Introduction of a Universal Declaration of Ocean Rights.
- **2031 - forward**: Implementing the Universal Declaration of Ocean Rights into relevant frameworks, both legally and non-legally binding.

For general enquiries please email: u dor@theoceanrace.com and learn more by visiting https://www.onebluevoice.net