

Environmental groups press leaders as UN Ocean Conference ends



Greenpeace activists hold banners saying: 'Protect the Oceans' during a demonstration outside the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon, Portugal [Pedro Nunes/Reuters]

Lisbon, July 2 (RHC)-- Environmental groups have urged world leaders to keep promises they made at the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon this week, to do everything in their power to save the world's seas.

“The ocean, climate and coastal communities worldwide need real progress, not promises, when it comes to ocean health,” Marco Lambertini, director-general of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), said on Friday.

The conference brought together about 7,000 delegates, including heads of state, scientists and NGOs. Many shared worries that the energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine could undermine efforts to fight climate change. Others, including President Emmanuel Macron of France, expressed concerns about deep-sea mining and some called for a moratorium.

Attendees at the conference assessed progress in implementing a UN directive to protect marine life. The WWF told leaders to seize the momentum and resolve longstanding issues surrounding the protection of the high seas such as plastic pollution by swiftly enacting and ratifying “robust global treaties.”

Lisbon is the last major political gathering before member states meet in August to try to hammer out a long-awaited treaty to shield open seas beyond national jurisdictions. Greenpeace’s Laura Meller said the success of the Lisbon conference would be measured in August.

“We have seen many declarations before, we have heard many promises, pledges and voluntary commitments,” said Meller. “But if declarations could save the oceans they wouldn’t be on the brink of collapse.”

Negotiations on the treaty began in 2018 after a decade of discussions at the UN but member states failed to reach a consensus in March.

In a joint statement published by an alliance of numerous NGOs, including BUND, WWF and Misereor, criticised the conference’s closing statement as non-committal; it remained uncertain, whether voluntary measures would be carried through, and there was neither a report on the progress of the goals set out in the last conference, which took place in New York in 2017, nor a means of control for the implementation of the new aims.

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