

Opening Statement IWC68 - Buenos Aires Group

Mr. Chair and other officers of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), Delegates, Observers and other participants,

The Representatives of the Governments of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay, member countries of the IWC and members of the so-called Buenos Aires Group (GBA), wish to take this opportunity to reaffirm once more their commitment to the IWC as the main international forum for the conservation and management of cetaceans.

In particular, we would like to highlight the efforts and hard work carried out by the IWC's Chairship, the Secretariat of the Commission and the IWC subsidiary bodies to continue their work in the adverse context caused by the COVID-19 emergency.

The GBA reiterates its commitment to the moratorium on commercial whaling, a measure that constitutes a milestone in the history of world conservationism, and reaffirms its determined opposition to trade in cetaceans and their derivatives, to the so-called "scientific" whaling and to whaling under reservation or objection to the moratorium. This commitment was reflected in the Florianópolis Declaration adopted by the IWC in its previous plenary meeting.

Due to the above, our Group wishes to express once more its firm commitment to the research and the non-lethal and non-extractive use of cetaceans, through the promotion of responsible whale-watching tourism.

The GBA expresses its solidarity and shares the concerns expressed by other Delegations regarding the food crisis and the need to find viable solutions for addressing this scourge in the competent international fora, in particular the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), whose mandate includes the fight against hunger and malnutrition at the global level. In this regard, we would like to stress that non-lethal uses of cetacean provide economic, social and environmental benefits that help to ensure local communities the necessary means to guarantee food security. In this sense, the GBA wishes to recognize the environmental, economic and social relevance of live cetaceans, highlighting their contribution to sustainable development and to face the global crisis of biodiversity loss, their special role in mitigating the effects of climate change, and its contribution to the functioning of aquatic ecosystems. The GBA congratulates the Scientific Committee and the Conservation Committee for the work done to move forward on this issue.

The GBA takes this opportunity to demand respect for the integrity of the Whale Sanctuaries already established by this Commission and to support the creation of new sanctuaries. In this respect, the GBA countries give their full support to the proposal for the creation of the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary (IWC/68/7.1/01) and its Management Plan, endorsed by the IWC's Scientific and Conservation Committees.

Likewise, we wish to recognize the evolution of IWC's mandate throughout its 76 years of existence, as well to highlight the importance of deepening the IWC's work on its

Ocean Sciences for Sustainable Development, the Political Declaration of the Second United Nations Ocean Conference, among other instruments.

We also highlight the need to promote cooperation to implement the international conservation agenda, including issues such as biodiversity and ecosystem services, climate change, economic assess of cetacean's services, protection measures based on areas of importance for cetaceans, whale-watching, strandings, disentanglement, bycatch, habitat degradation, ship strikes, marine debris, emerging diseases, chemical and noise pollution and other threats.

In this sense, we acknowledge the extremely serious problem caused by the accumulation of plastic waste of different sizes that ends up in the oceans, which causes damage throughout the marine food chain, and we highlight the work carried out by the Scientific and Conservation Committees in this regard, expressing our support to the proposed Resolution on Marine Plastic Pollution (IWC/68/8.1/01).

The GBA supports the governments involved in the formulation and implementation of Conservation Management Plans for various species, as well as the proposal for the Conservation Management Plan for Humpback whales of the Central American population of the North Pacific.

We wish to highlight, once more, the great importance of the Scientific Committee's work, not only within the IWC, but also in the conservation and management of cetaceans at the global level, and we would like to make an appeal to ensure that the decisions to be adopted guarantee the good functioning of this Committee.

The GBA avails itself of this opportunity to recognize the work carried out by the Working Group on Operational Effectiveness in considering the recommendations arising from the Report of the Independent Review Panel with a view to the governance reform and modernization of the IWC and reiterates its support to the debates held, as well as the continuation of transparent and proactive negotiations to reach the necessary agreements for an appropriate management of the IWC.

Additionally, the GBA wishes to recognize the importance of an active participation of civil society in non-lethal research and cetacean conservation issues and of continuing working on joint and concrete actions to strengthen its participation in the various bodies of the IWC.

Finally, we call on all Member States to make the necessary efforts to hold debates in the framework of the IWC based always on the best available scientific evidence, reaffirming the GBA's willingness and cooperation for a successful and fruitful plenary meeting.