

Annex D

Opening Remarks

WELCOME SPEECHES FROM THE SLOVENIAN GOVERNMENT

Mr Đenio Zadkovič, Mayor of Piran, Slovenia

Distinguished authorities, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Portorož.

The Municipality of Piran is truly proud to host the International Whaling Commission for the third time since its founding. The excellent conference services and beautiful views that our location offers undoubtedly had an important role in defining this year's venue location.

Historically, the Mediterranean Sea was a trade route, a source of life, and a melting pot of many peoples offering endless possibilities to anyone passing through this area. The Adriatic Sea constitutes an important part of it: it is where the West meets the East, Central Europe meets the Balkans, and where the Roman territories and Slavic world blend.

In the past, different cultures and peoples tested their strength on this territory. In the end, recognising and accepting similarities and differences was one of the key elements that made the Mediterranean area flourish faster than other parts of Europe.

We, who live by the sea, love the sea, but at the same time fear its force when unexpectedly spills over our shores. Preserving it and protecting sea creatures in a sustainable way is our duty. The local community under the auspices of the National Institute for Marine Biology in Piran is leading an important role in research and advocacy in this field. We are also very proud of Slovenian Marine Mammal Society Morigenos, who is leading an important scientific research, monitoring and education activities. Their goal is to achieve effective conservation of the marine environment and biodiversity, including the preservation of the cetaceans in the Slovenian sea.

Besides the protection and promotion of natural heritage, the Municipality of Piran is responsible for preserving and promoting our cultural heritage. One of our most famous and influential families, the Tartini's, owes its wealth and reputation to the salt trade, an important economic branch on which Piran grew well through the past. It was thanks to the good socio-economic position of Tartini's family that Giuseppe secured his place in society. However, maestro Tartini did not choose priesthood nor commerce, and became a well-known violinist and teacher.

The government of the Republic of Slovenia nominated 2022 as Tartini's year, as we honour his 330th birthday. On this occasion, the Municipality of Piran and numerous partners celebrate this special year with many educational, scientific, art, and of course, music events. This nomination is very important for recognizing Maestro's achievements in the field of music, mathematics and science. In addition, it is also of great importance to our citizens, who would like to see Tartini's fame grow, both locally and worldwide.

I am sure that you will feel at home in our multicultural Mediterranean town, where Slovenians and Italians both feel at home.

Dear guests, we sincerely hope you enjoy your stay and visit us again someday.

Mr Uroš Brežan, Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning, Slovenia

Your Excellencies, Commissioners, Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished participants,

Let me wish you all a warm welcome in Slovenia.

This meeting takes place in a period where a biodiversity crisis, a climate crisis and a pollution crisis are all affecting our planet. The challenges are unprecedented. Therefore, unprecedented solutions are needed to deal with all of them at the same time. They will require strength and smartness on our side. We have experienced both fatal forest fires in the region of Kras and river floods in recent months. And my "home" river Soča, rightly called "the Emerald river", that was bringing the freshness of the Alps to the Mediterranean, is getting warmer every year. Add to these the recent geopolitical developments, threatening the world with energy shortages and food insecurity, and we get a complex picture of challenges that needs to be addressed.

We depend on services our preserved nature and ecosystems are providing. Therefore, it is crucial to protect them, if we want to continue to live with them. Seas and oceans cover a major part of our planet, and as science progresses, we realise more and more how strongly in this globally connected world we all depend on them and their good state.

Important steps have already been made in the frame of the UN by all our countries, and with support of civil society, to address the issue of plastic pollution. The UN resolution on plastics adopted this year paves the way for the negotiations towards the internationally legally binding agreement on plastic. Slovenia is committed to ending plastic pollution; this is why we already joined the High Ambition Coalition on plastic and encourage other countries to join as well.

It is expected that bold steps will be made by the end of the year at conferences of parties in Sharm El Sheikh and Montreal to address the climate and biodiversity crises. Climate COP27 will be another important milestone for adaptation to climate change, including through nature-based solutions. While biodiversity COP15 will be essential for reversing biodiversity loss and setting 2030 global targets, including 30 by 30 targets to protect at least 30 percent of land and sea, these efforts should lead to a better world we all strive for.

We see IWC having an important role in these processes.

We hope this meeting will bring progress on more effective functioning of the IWC, ensuring sustainable financing and directing the organisation on further steps. This will ensure conservation and management of cetaceans [setejšns], that contribute to solving the crises and challenges we all face.

Dear friends, Slovenia is a country rich with biodiversity: our protected areas cover over 40% of the territory of our country. We have valuable experience on conservation and management of large percentage of protected areas. Achieving global biodiversity targets on protection, to be adopted by the end of this year, will therefore present a challenge, requiring support, including from the IWC.

There are some interesting examples of protected areas and their management in this part of Slovenia, so I hope you will have some time after the meeting to experience them for yourselves.

I sincerely hope that the salty chocolate, with traditionally produced salt from the neighbouring protected area, will give you some extra energy needed for achieving our ambitious goals.

I wish you all a successful meeting and look forward to welcoming you in the evening.

Thank you.

Mr Samuel Žbogar, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia

Excellencies, Honourable delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The pleasure is also mine to be able to welcome you to Slovenia. Slovenia is known to be a green country. But it is also very much a blue one. Our history, landscape, culture and economy – as well as our foreign relations – are strongly linked to the Adriatic Sea. Direct sea access is a great privilege and a strategic advantage for any country, but it also entails an immense responsibility.

The environmental crisis we are witnessing is alarming. Today, we call it a triple crisis, but it is very likely that it will multiply further. Oceans are its first victim, but can also be an important part of the solution. We value them as a source of innovative ways to help fight climate change and take the green transition to a higher level. We need to increase the oceans' resilience and prioritize global ocean action, as proposed by the recent UN Ocean Conference.

Slovenia is a staunch supporter of multilateralism. Today, in times of deep geopolitical divisions and mistrust, we need more multilateral cooperation, and not less. Global challenges can only be addressed multilaterally. Oceans are a global good, as nearly two-thirds of them are beyond national jurisdiction. Protecting and restoring them thus requires a collective global effort.

This year, Slovenia has taken part in several multilateral environmental initiatives. For instance, it was one of the key promoters of the resolution on the right to a healthy environment adopted by the UN General Assembly. Furthermore, Slovenia is actively involved in the preparations for the UN 2023 Water Conference and is pushing, together with many other countries, for the establishment of a post for a UN Water Envoy. We have revitalised the Green Group – a group of small countries committed to environmental issues in external action.

As Minister Brežan has already stressed, Slovenia is a country particularly sensitive to plastic pollution, including in the oceans. I am pleased that Slovenia now takes part in the global High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution by 2040. You can count on our strong support in the negotiations for establishing an international, legally binding instrument on this matter.

In addition, Slovenia has based its candidature for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the 2024-25 term on a strong environmental commitment, linking climate, water and food security. If elected, we will do our utmost to keep climate and environmental security high on the Security Council's agenda. Slovenia has repeatedly demonstrated that it can bring to the table the perspective of a small country, aware of contemporary challenges and supportive of effective multilateral cooperation at global and regional levels.

In this context, it is a particular honour for Slovenia to chair this year's meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). We highly appreciate the Commission's hard work, commitment and invaluable contribution to sustainable ocean governance. In particular, we appreciate your work on the conservation of cetaceans [setejšns] and their management. We will do our best to assure productive discussions in the coming days and stand ready to support your work in the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen, relations between our countries and societies are intrinsically shaped by global challenges. How we will live and interact in the future largely depends on the planetary health. Degradation of the environment and its biodiversity, climate and water crises, and food and energy insecurity are closely interconnected. The stakes are extremely high and the challenge to do it right is extremely complex.

I therefore wish you a very successful meeting. Your work provides powerful impetus for global action – not only in the sphere of marine biodiversity and whale conservation and management, but way beyond that.

Thank you.