



United Nations International Year of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS)
United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy For All (2014-2024)

Media Release

Small islands crown Sylvia Earle “First Lady of the Oceans”

9 September 2014, Apia, Samoa: Sylvia Earle, explorer-in-residence at the National Geographic Society, has been called the “Sturgeon General,” the “Joan of Arc of the Oceans,” “Hero for the Planet,” and “Her Deepness.” In Samoa, she was crowned the “First Lady of the Oceans” by SIDS DOCK – the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Sustainable Energy mechanism, created to finance climate change adaptation through transformation of the SIDS energy sector. Dr. Earle has one wish, and that is to protect our oceans which she refers to as, “the blue heart of the planet.” For small islands, who are custodians for over 30 percent of oceans, she represents a powerful voice and advocate that gained attention for small islands who are promoting a blue-green economy, during the recently concluded United Nations (UN) Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, in Apia, Samoa, from 1-4 September.

During her presentation at the SIDS DOCK Side Event, “Ocean Resources and Climate Resilience,” on 1 September, Dr. Earle told a standing room only audience of over 150 delegates, including dozens of Heads of State and Governments, global leaders and members of the international development community that after more than 50 expeditions worldwide involving more than 6,000 hours underwater, she has personally witnessed the steady and now rapid deterioration of the world’s oceans. “We are using a lot of the parts, and we can’t put the parts together again...no ocean, no life; no life, no us.” The ocean has absorbed about 30 percent of all of the carbon dioxide we humans have sent into the atmosphere since the start of the Industrial Revolution – some 150 billion tons.

Small islands and low lying states that are members of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) are the custodians of 15, or 30 percent, of the 50 largest exclusive economic zones. Kiribati, the largest small island developing state in terms of ocean territory, has the 13th largest exclusive economic zone on Earth. There are no rivers in The Bahamas, but the world’s third longest barrier reef and about 14.5 per cent of the world’s coral can be found in these waters. SIDS are uniquely dependent on the marine environment and live off and by the oceans - the coastal and marine environment is an integral part of our island lifestyle. With its vast capacity to absorb heat and carbon dioxide, the physical impacts of climate change on the ocean are now very clear and dramatic. Dr. Earle, more than any other explorer and oceanographer knows this.

The impacts are startling. Mass coral bleaching resulting in the starvation, shrinkage, and death of the corals that support the thousands of species that live on coral reefs; fish migration in response to ocean warming, disrupting fisheries around the world; meanwhile, rising sea levels, partly the result of heat absorbed by the ocean, is also “drowning” wetlands.

On the final day of the SIDS conference, participants had the opportunity to view the film, *Mission Blue*, the embodiment of Dr. Earle’s hope for the oceans, hosted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), one of the organisations credited with the development of SIDS DOCK. The private screening at SPREP was an eye-opener for participants in terms of food security, the potential that the ocean can yield as the largest renewable source of energy for SIDS, and the high price the ocean is paying with the formation of “dead zones” in the past few decades. Mission Blue is committed to developing networks of global marine protected areas, or “Hopespots,” large enough to save and restore the ocean, the blue heart of the planet.

SIDS DOCK and Mission Blue, along with Google, will be establishing a partnership to nominate Hopespots, the seeds of tomorrow's healthy ocean, across the SIDS regions. As Dr. Earle noted, only 5 per cent of the ocean has been seen and mapped, and, "all we have on earth, is all we ever have," she concluded.

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Further information on SIDS DOCK participation at Samoa is available at: <http://sidsdockforum2014.org/>

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Dr. Sylvia Earle, world-renowned oceanographer and explorer-in-residence at the National Geographic Society, was guest speaker at the SIDS DOCK Side Event, "Ocean Resources and Climate Resilience," in Apia, Samoa, at the UN Third Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS). From left to right: Mr. Jan Hartke, Director, Global Climate Initiative, Clinton Climate Initiative - Clean Energy Program; Dr. Pradeep Monga, Director of the Energy and Climate Change Branch, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); Dr. Al Binger, Energy Science Advisor at the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) and SIDS DOCK Coordinator; Und May Gordon, SIDS Delegate; Jeanette Larue, Technical Adviser for Environment Education, Ministry of Environment and Energy, Republic of the Seychelles and SIDS DOCK Public Education and Awareness Working Group Leader; Dr. Sylvia Earle; Lesley Ann Welsh, SIDS DOCK Public Education and Awareness Consultant; Espen Ronneberg, Climate Change Adviser, Secretariat of the Pacific Environment Programme (SPREP)