

SYMPOSIUM ON THE STATE OF THE CONSERVATION OF WHALES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

(Statement by Juanita Castaño, Chief UNEP NY office- April 12 th, 2007)

- UNEP is always pleased to facilitate the efforts of NGOs addressing international environmental issues in spirit of good co-operation. This is what we call within UNEP our “Natural Allies” approach to NGOs: they are natural partners of the UN as a whole and of UNEP in particular. So we were happy to assist The Varda Group when they approached us on behalf of the Pew Charitable Trusts seeking our support to host this symposium, and it is my pleasure to welcome you all on behalf of UNEP to this building. The Executive Director of UNEP and Under-Secretary General of the United Nations Achim Steiner has asked me to tell you that he has great interest in your discussions, and that he looks forward to hearing of the outcome.
- I also want to express my own profound appreciation of your efforts over the next two days to seek a solution to the protracted whaling controversy. As you know, the International Whaling Commission is not a UN body, and UNEP has no formal role in its meetings. But we are in some respects on a parallel track, at least beginning in 1972, as this was the year that the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment recommended the creation of UNEP and coincidentally first called for a moratorium on commercial whaling.

The UN family does, however, include a number of conventions which have direct bearing on the matter you are here to discuss: First I should mention the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) which places great emphasis on the conservation of living marine resources, recognizing that to protect marine mammals States may take action that goes beyond the provisions of the international regime. In addition the UNEP-administered Conventions on Biological Diversity, on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and on Migratory Species are also extremely important to secure the conservation of cetaceans. In that connection, your discussions will benefit greatly from the participation of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species, Dr. Robert Hepworth..

- The relevance of these and other multilateral environment agreements to the future of whales and other cetaceans reminds us that these animals are facing multiple threats. This contemporary situation, which of course could not be envisaged in 1946 when the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling was signed, reminds us all of the need to be extremely cautious – to be precautionary in our actions, a concept which is at the centre of environmental policy today.
- On behalf of UNEP, I would like to thank you all for your participation. I hope you have a very productive meeting that can contribute to creatively charting a new and sustainable way forward. I look forward to the results of your discussions.

Now I give the floor to his Excellency Sir Geoffrey Palmer, who will chair this meeting.

Thank you.

