



Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

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Consultative
Status with
United Nations
ECOSOC,
UNCTAD and
UNESCO

Special
Consultative
Relations
with FAO,
ILO and
UNICEF

9 September 2023

Dear Prime Minister

United Nations "High Seas Treaty"

After more than a decade of negotiations, 193 United Nations (UN) member countries have agreed the first ever treaty to protect the world's oceans that lie outside national boundaries.

We are writing to you from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF UK) to alert you to the United Nations "High Seas Treaty" which will open for signature at UN headquarters in New York from September 20 this year.

WILPF urges the UK government to be one of the first States Parties to sign the Treaty and to put in place parliamentary time to achieve its ratification. It will only enter into force one year after 60 States have signed and ratified the Treaty.

Two-thirds of the world's oceans are currently considered international waters. That means all countries have a right to fish, ship and do research there. But until now only about 1% of these waters – known as "high seas" – have been protected. This leaves the marine life living in the vast majority of the high seas at risk of exploitation from threats including climate change, overfishing and shipping traffic.

As one of the 193 nation states of the UN that made this Agreement, you will know that it addresses four key issues.

- It sets up a framework for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from activities with respect to marine genetic resources and digital sequence information on marine genetic resources of areas beyond national jurisdiction, ensuring that such activities benefit all of humanity.
- It will enable the establishment of area-based management tools, including marine protected areas, to conserve and sustainably manage vital habitats and species in the high seas and the international seabed area. Such measures are critical for achieving the "30 by 30" global target to effectively conserve and manage at least 30% of the world's terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas by 2030, as agreed in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
- It will ensure that environmental impacts of activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction are assessed and considered in decision-making. It also provides, for the first time, an international legal framework for the assessment of the cumulative impacts of activities and the consequences of climate change, ocean acidification and related impacts, in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

- It will facilitate cooperation in capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology to assist Parties, in particular developing States Parties, in achieving the objectives of the Agreement, so as to level the playing field for all States to responsibly utilise and benefit from marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Furthermore, the Agreement addresses several cross-cutting issues, such as its relationship with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and relevant legal instruments and frameworks and relevant global, regional, subregional and sectoral bodies, as well as funding and dispute settlement. It also sets up institutional arrangements, including a Conference of the Parties, a Scientific and Technical Body and other subsidiary bodies of the Conference of the Parties, a Clearing-House Mechanism and a secretariat.

WILPF UK looks forward to your reassurance that the UK government will sign the Treaty and create parliamentary time to ensure ratification.

Yours in peace

Paula Shaw
National Secretary
for WILPF UK Executive Committee

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Prime Minister
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London SW1A 2AS



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The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
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Challenge militarism: invest in peace

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The Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
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