

»Hydrographers as surveyors and describers of all physics of the seas«

The inaugural speech by MATHIAS JONAS*

»Distinguished delegates, distinguished observers, dear colleagues and – I dare say – fellows and friends,

Well, I have often tried to imagine what this moment would be like, how it would feel. Now that the moment has actually come, I am just overwhelmed. Overwhelmed by your support, overwhelmed by the level of trust you have placed in me.

As you know, I have shared a rather long history with this organisation. I have served in several functions at the IHO in the course of two decades, always trying to give my best for the task at hand. Your endorsement as the first Secretary-General elect doubtless marks the peak of this career, but my attitude has always been to repay your trust to the best of my ability, and that attitude is not going to change in the future.

Actually, the probability that I would ever reach such a level of responsibility was rather low, to say the least. I grew up in a divided country. Living in the fenced-in part of Germany, I had a strong motivation to become a professional seafarer because this was one of the few options available to me if I wanted to explore the world beyond the wall.

But then the unexpected happened, the political leaders of the eighties at one point decided against confrontation and in favour of cooperation. It was the revival of intergovernmental cooperation that opened up a window of opportunity at the time and made it possible to tear down the walls, and which ultimately has given me the chance to stand here today on this special occasion.

»The desire to pursue intergovernmental cooperation in hydrography« – this phrase in the preamble to our renewed Convention describes exactly my perception of the role of Secretary-General as the responsible enabler. But being responsible does not mean to act alone.

I appreciate your designation of Abri Kampfner from South Africa and Mustafa Iptes from Turkey

as the new directors and I am happy about your decision. Both colleagues are well known to me, and I am looking forward with confidence and optimism to our future close collaboration. I have good reasons for being optimistic because I know from experience that the Secretariat's staff is highly professional on all levels of qualification. I am sure that we will form an excellent team that will be capable of meeting all challenges ahead.


There is an old Latin saying which you all know, namely: »Times change, and we are changing with them.« Based on this philosophy, my concept for the IHO is to adopt a programme of continuity and evolution.

The IHO can be proud of its traditions and achievements. The hundredth anniversary of its foundation will be celebrated during my tenure, and this event will be a good occasion for us to look back and remember.

We will hear about brave surveyors, capable cartographers, and ambitious thought leaders. In the preceding generation, the latter were pathfinders in the early days of navigational chart digitisation and the rearrangement of our constitution. It is on the basis of this legacy that we will try to answer the questions of today and tomorrow. Another cycle of digitisation of all activities related to the sea is about to happen, and hydrographic offices will have to cope with this.

International cooperation within our community and cross-sectoral collaboration will be crucial and, in order to cope with the challenge, we will have to join forces and move in one direction. There are many potential partners out there who may act in union with us in the world governance of the oceans: politics, administrations, industry, scientists and – last but not least – public opinion. Working with them under the IHO umbrella and speaking with one voice can help us climb to a new level of perception: hydrographers as the surveyors and describers of all physics of the seas.

In order to achieve this goal, I will be fully committed to the wide range of tasks ahead of us. My motivation is very high but, in order to be successful, I will need more than your vote today and your moral support later on. It will be your dedication, your commitment and solidarity that will be crucial to success and which will essentially determine the future evolution of the organisation.

You have placed me at the steering wheel in order to keep the IHO on its pre-set track, and I promise that I will do my duty and always navigate the ship in safe waters.« 

* Mathias Jonas held his inaugural speech at 11:30 p.m. on April 28th in Monaco

Mathias Jonas, the new Secretary-General of the IHO

