

Keynote address by Chairman

Your excellency, Mohamed bin Nasser Al-Rasby, SecGEN Min Def, Hd Armed Forces, Military and Security Commanders, distinguished guests, Member, Associate and Observer states of the North Indian Ocean Hydrographic Commission welcome to the 19th meeting of our Commission.

Your excellency, on behalf of all delegates, I would like to express my sincere thanks to you and Oman for your support in hosting this prestigious conference.

It is both a delight and great honour to be in the magnificent city of Muscat, with such a rich heritage, and a maritime history that stretches back over a thousand years. Complimenting this extensive history are state of the art maritime programmes, such as the special Economic Zone of Duqm and many other marine and maritime developments along your important and strategic coastline. Not forgetting of course, that we find ourselves in a beautiful warm climate, only surpassed by the genuine warmth of the hospitality provided by Oman.

History and heritage are important touch stones and 100 years ago on the 24 July 1919 the Hydrographers of Great Britain and France co-operated to convene an international conference of hydrographers to be held in London. Twenty four nations attended with the aim of considering the adoption of similar methods in preparation, construction and production of charts and hydrographic publications to institute a prompt system of mutual exchange of information in addition to providing an opportunity to consult and discuss on hydrographic subjects. As a result of what was a three week conference a permanent organisation was formed in 1921.

It is that organisation, the IHO, that causes us to be here today to continue that aim of collaboration and sharing ideas and expertise. This 19th gathering of the NIOHC is taking place, courtesy of our generous hosts here in Muscat at a time of unprecedented change in the world of hydrography with the

demand for Marine and Maritime Geospatial data never stronger. The aims of our Commission remain as relevant today as when they were first drafted and with 19 Coastal States represented, all 10 of our members, our 6 associate members and 3 observers most notably Somalia and Yemen here for the meeting we are well placed to deliver on the potential for a very successful meeting. I must also thank our Observer organizations and industry for taking the time out of their busy diaries to join us.

This presence of experts in the field of hydrography and nautical cartography, an understanding of the maritime dynamics of our region and the expertise from IALA, the IMO and IHO presents us with a huge opportunity to progress our science for the safety and benefit of the Mariner and marine user at sea.

Hydrography is traditionally and well-known for its capacity to support safety of navigation. However, clearly it plays an ever increasing and important role in sustainability and development through international trade “Blue Economy”, environmental protection, national security, and a range of fishing and leisure activity.

“Hydrographic information driving marine knowledge” is the IHO theme for this year and the availability of our rich marine data sets is fundamental to understanding and exploiting our marine and maritime domains. Whilst we are continuing to improve safety at sea through the core elements of this commission, we must also forge ahead with the emerging spatial data and marine spatial planning discipline in order to maximise the use of the data collected. Our world is changing. The Data Revolution is likely to present our economies and societies with both opportunities and challenges that were hitherto thought impossible.

Data is now fundamental to our lives. We are all carrying devices that can tell us where we are, in how many steps we made the journey, and how many calories we spent to do so. We are experiencing a ‘data revolution’ and as the custodians of marine

geospatial data, we are at the forefront of this change, it is our collective arena.

If you look at land transportation as an example, driverless vehicles are already underway, and on the seas, unmanned ships are becoming a reality. This will no doubt change the requirements in the hydrographic community, and although challenging we should aim to be proactive rather than reactive to such change. I believe that we all have a collective responsibility to ensure that marine geospatial data is part of this journey of change/. Whether that is by providing access to vast stores of information, or by promoting the development of skills and expertise we all have a critical part to play.

A few moments ago I said that our world is changing, but let me be clear: it will change, with or without us. We here today and gathered for this Commission meeting must make the choice to champion the cause and ensure that we guide and support this data revolution and ensure that hydrography, bathymetry, seabed mapping and marine geospatial information are not forgotten or ignored.

As we approach the decade of Ocean Science and determine how we as a community can support the UNs Sustainable Development Goals particularly SDG 14, our data is never more important and in our own community we must not forget the aspirations of GEBCO and the NIPPON Foundation in delivering Seabed 2030.

Turning our attention to this commission meeting, we have a robust agenda, and I look forward to your valuable contributions throughout. We have already experienced this during the valuable Hydrographic Awareness Seminar and technical international chart coordination group that convened yesterday.

Interspersed with this meeting once again at the very kind invitation and generosity of our hosts the Royal Navy of Oman, The Ministry of Transport and Communication and the Oman National Hydrographic Office we are honoured to be hosted

onboard RNOV SHABAB OMAN II tomorrow evening and to attend the Conference Dinner at Shafaq Club, the Armed Forces Club this evening.

With nineteen Coastal States involved in this meeting and the exemplary support of our hosts, we have a unique opportunity to advance hydrography in the oceans that bind us together and I ask all in attendance to give it their fullest attention and to actively contribute to ensure we deliver a successful and meaningful Commission meeting. I know that we have barely scratched the surface of what is possible with modern, up to date hydrographic practices and I also know that by sharing our expertise and partnering across industry, academia and government we can maximise the benefits of our activities to the whole marine and maritime community.

Thank you for listening and without further delay I believe I am now handing the podium over to IHO Director Mustafa Iptes.