

**MODERATOR:** **SPEAKERS:**

**H.E. Mr. Rui Macieira**  
Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Portugal

**Mrs. Pamela Coke-Hamilton**  
UNCTAD

**Mr. Audun Lem**  
FAO

**Mr. David Vivas Eugui**  
UNCTAD

**Mr. Jan Hoffmann**  
UNCTAD

**Mr. Rabih Haddad**  
UNITAR

**Mr. Awni Behnam**  
IOI

**Mr. Stephen Fevrier**  
Permanent Delegation of the OECS

**Mr. Francois Baillet**  
UN/OLA/DOALOS

**04**

**June 2020**  
3–5 p.m.

**ONLINE CONFERENCE**

**LIVE**

**WORLD OCEANS DAY**

**The Blue Economy and COVID-19 Pandemic:  
New challenges, recovery measures and resilience**

UNITED NATIONS UNCTAD

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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**The Blue Economy and COVID-19 Pandemic:  
New Challenges, Recovery Measures and  
Resilience .**

**World Oceans Online Conference 3–5 p.m. (CET)  
Thursday 4 June 2020**

**Presentation by Panellist Dr. Awni behnam**



COVID- 19 has been a wakeup call after three lost decades in multilateral cooperation for development as we enter uncharted waters of a consequential *perfect storm*. A storm arising from the converging challenges of global security, climate change and economic financial crisis; and added to this is the systematic erosion of rule based trading system.

The post COVID-19 resilience and recovery for a vibrant Blue Economy will depend on a different approach to multilateral development cooperation for trade and beyond trade.

No longer viable multilateral cooperation that is based on ***we gave nothing and we got nothing*** syndrome which dominated multilateral cooperation for decades, nor is the aspirational philosophy of ***wait for it and the market will solve all problems***.

Hence there is a valid reason to place in focus the Blue Economy and Blue Growth in a new development perspective that is human centred, after all it is the ingenuity of the human being that propels progress.

The Blue Economy paradigm is an integrated approach to cross cutting sectors in the governance of the ocean and urban interface, implying an inclusive partnership between all stakeholders that internalises the conformity of the short term needs with long term objectives of sustainable growth.

An important tenet of the Blue Economy is that responsibility as well as sharing in the cost and benefits does not rest with any single entity or sector or the State but is spread among all stakeholders.

It is the responsibility of all stakeholders in an integrated paradigm at the level of the individual, child, adult, locality community, society, institutions national, regional, public and private sectors.

Post COVID- 19 the Blue Economy recovery and Blue Growth as any other productive economic, environmental and social sector will require corrective measures combined with adequate resources both human and financial to address Challenges of adaptation and mitigation and navigate safely the perfect storm.

There is no denying that the pandemic has negatively impacted all industries (marine related), trade services, tourism business and financial institutions etc. However, post COVID-19 the blue economy

will require considerable financial resource for recovery, resilience and adaptation.

Consequently, we must rekindle a long controversial debate as who should pay when the case is that of benefiting from free access to resource and services of the ocean. An issue that goes beyond the consequence of the pandemic and in the context of healthy multilateral cooperation for development and sustainability, the very reason of a Blue Economy.

In this case we need to examine who benefits from free access to oceans living and non- living resources and yet do not make in return a contribution commensurate with that privilege. For example, compensation could be in the form a notional levy that goes towards support of developing countries and SIDS who invest in the Blue Economy future.

I submit as a policy of reason that If a farmer pays rent for the land, he cultivates why do industrial fishing fleets and fishing consortia not pay in return a notional levy for their free access to oceans living resources?

Why do road transporters pay tolls, but shipping companies pay nothing for the free navigation of their ships in maritime transport considering the amount of pollution shipping contribute to the environment.

This concept equally applies to pharmaceutical companies, oil and gas extractive companies and others benefiting from free access to ocean living and non-living resources.

Equally cosmetic companies and those producers of plastic products as in packaging which results in micro plastic entering the food chain, an existential danger to human health. Also consider those who dispose of toxins and land-based pollution stressing ocean living resources and could in theory provoke new pathogens emerging in the future.

Also, similar levy for blue services, not unlike the Tobin tax on financial transactions in blue services could be added to the list. consequently, activating not only polluter pays principle but also user pay.

If this is too radical ,which in my opinion is not, then Blue Bonds as means of financing Blue Growth should be additionally considered in post COVID 19 new multilateral cooperation agenda as a contribution to meet capacity building needs of developing and countries in transition that institutionalise the Blue Economy concept . However, these must be managed differently to green carbon trading permits which eventually resulted in a permit to pollute.

Having said that I hope to raise two issues the first is the unsung heroes of the blue economy, seafarers and fishers who are on the frontline of this global calamity; about 1.3 million are distant and semi distant water fisher's mostly migrant workers toiling in dangerous conditions providing 30% of protein to the less privileged people in developing and least developed countries .

Professor Alistair Couper et al, documented seafarers and fishers' plight in his book *Fishers Plunderers Theft Slavery and Violence at Sea*, thus exposing the dirty secret of human rights abuse in an industry infected with criminality.

These Fishers spend several years at sea under inhuman conditions and modern day slavery of unpaid wages ,lack of adequate food , water, sanitation ,no medical care excessive working hours ,extended periods at sea verbal and physical abuse, human trafficking and abandonment and even murder, today COVID -19 made these seafarers even less visible.

There are various international conventions of IMO, ILO and many more international instruments on the rights, duties and conditions of service, also UNCLOS addresses rights of people working at sea, however sadly the surveillance, implementation and enforcement mechanisms fall far too short from providing an adequate safety net for the seafarers .

Addressing this situation requires regional, international multilateral cooperation, particularly in enforcement of the genuine link between a vessel and the flag state as mandated by UNCLOS and defined by the UNCTAD /UN Convention on Registration of Ships awaiting to be ratified since 1986.

Is it not time to revisit that convention and help ending the suffering and abuse of sea farers? History will judge us not only whether we got through this pandemic but also on the action we took and lessons we learnt.

This brings me to the third issue I wish to raise; the people factor and consideration of people in a growing sustainable Blue Economy and the concept of capacity development.

We have seen the evolution of the concept of development from technical assistance to capacity building. However, capacity development can only be achieved if it includes transfer of technology. In the absence of multilaterally agreed code of conduct for effective transfer of technology there is a need to resort to a different tool to sustain blue economy and blue growth that is adequate to fulfil the need for empowered and skilled human resources in all ocean and coastal disciplines and expertise . Hence the focus must be human resources development of knowledgeable and empowered practitioners with technological and management capabilities that operate in all the different interdependent marine and coastal sectors of the blue economy. To adequately achieve such objective the training and preparation of a continuous stream of human resources would be imperative,

An idea that I shared recently with Professor Philip Wilson from Southampton University as part of the solution is the creation and support of Blue Economy Career Centres where the concept of the Blue Economy has been institutionalised to prepare a variety of human resources required from the general knowledge and advocacy to the professional skilled practitioners needed to fuel blue growth

Such centers may be of limited or of wide scope of coverage to serve both as learning institution, research, training, education etc. with international and regional cooperation and collaboration in public private partnership.

IOI since its inception in 1972 has devoted its efforts to capacity development in ocean governance through training education and empowerment because it is our conviction that the human factor is the ultimate tool in resilience, recovery and progress in the reversal and mitigation of impacts such as the COVID19 pandemic .

Dr. Awni Behnam

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Honorary President, International Ocean Institute

Affiliate Professor, University of Malta

### **Relevant literature**

A. Behnam, Tracing the Blue Economy, Lumen, Monograph Series, Vol.1, Fondation de Malte,2013. (Amazon).

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Alistair Couper et all, Fishers and Plunderers, Theft, Slavery and Violence at Sea , Pluto press,2015 , page 58.

United Nations Convention on Conditions for Registration of Ships, TD/RS/CONF /25, UN 1990.