

**THE CENTRE FOR MARITIME LAW AND SECURITY AFRICA (CEMLAWS
AFRICA) CALLS FOR THE ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS TO PROTECT THE
WORLDS OCEANS ON WORLD OCEANS DAY 2017**

The United Nations General Assembly in 2008 decided that the 8th of June every year should be designated as “World Oceans Day”. Today, the world celebrates World’s Oceans Day as a reminder of the all-pervasive importance of the oceans to human existence. The global theme for this year’s celebration is “Our Oceans, Our Future” – a theme that has a bearing on Goal 14 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 14 seeks to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The theme, much like Ghana’s theme “Our Seas, Sustaining Livelihoods, Securing Our Future”, calls on all states and individuals to take steps to reduce and eliminate the global problem of plastic pollution in our oceans.

The celebration of the day is meant to highlight and raise global awareness of the relevance of and problems confronting the five vast oceans of the world: the Arctic, Atlantic, Indian, Pacific and Southern oceans. Interestingly, these oceans cover about two-thirds of the surface of the Earth and contain close to 97% of the planet’s water supply, making them a viable host to some of the world’s most significant ecosystems. Again, they support our climate and form a critical part of the biosphere, while providing major communication lines for the transportation of goods around the world.

These tangible benefits and opportunities from the ocean create wealth for countries...wealth that forms a thriving economy on its own, referred to as the Blue Economy. The Blue Economy concept involves recognition of the fact that working to enhance the health and productivity of our oceans promotes sustainable growth and economic development, especially for coastal countries such as Ghana. As a matter of fact, Goal 14 of the SDGs can only be attained in the presence of a thriving Blue Economy.

Despite their relevance, a myriad of problems face the oceans. Less than 1% of the world’s oceans are protected. Pollution largely from plastics and other marine litter pose impediments for the health of the oceans. It is estimated that more than eight million tons of plastic wastes are dumped into the sea annually. These plastics entangle most species of marine mammals and more than ninety percent of seabirds have pieces of plastics in

their stomachs. The gist of the menace is that plastic waste dumped at stay permanently at sea; plastic waste is indestructible. Moreover, plastics impact the safety of sea transport and fisheries. Fishermen trawl only to get plastics.

Although the observance of this day in Ghana highlights this menace of ocean threats, it should more importantly be celebrated with a commitment to address the many problems confronting Ghana's territorial waters. A lot of Ghanaians depend on the marine fisheries and thus, the unsustainable use of the world's oceans is a threat to livelihood. The fisheries sector employs about ten percent of Ghanaians and is a significant consumer of fish and fish products. Ghana's per capita fish consumption significantly exceeds that of both Africa and the world. While Africa's and the world's per capita consumption are 10.5 kg and 18.9 kg respectively, Ghana's is 28 kg. Our dependence on the oceans resources strongly suggests sustainable use of its resources and protection but it seems not to be the case as unsustainable, prohibited and illegal fishing methods are rife in Ghana. Fishers in Ghana are already experiencing the realities of an unsustainable fishery with at least dwindling fishing landings.

The discovery of offshore petroleum resources in Ghana adds to the ocean's problems. The exploitation and development of the oceans resources are attended with environmental issues such as: the conduct of seismic surveys whose waves could both destroy the sound detection abilities of marine mammals and the reproductive system of fish stock; discharge of drilling fluids and other waste substances; and the emission of greenhouse gases. Accidental oil spills are potential issues. Since the commercial discovery of petroleum resources in 2009, there have been reports of the deaths of whales that believed to be connected with petroleum activities.

As we celebrate the day, the Centre for Maritime Law and Security Africa (CEMLAWS Africa) calls on the government, environmental regulatory institutions, the Fisheries Commission and the citizenry to collaborate towards protect marine areas. Enforcement of the relevant laws and regulations is key to protecting marine areas and resources. It ought to be recognized that reducing or eliminating ocean plastic pollution is shared responsibility. In addition, to be able to attain and create a sustainable Blue Economy, stakeholders in the maritime industry must participate in training and capacity building exercises relevant for understanding the essence of oceans and its role in Sustainable

development.

This article is a snapshot of a broader evolving initiative by the Centre for Maritime Law and Security Africa to create awareness on maritime security and ocean governance issues through capacity building, research and policy guidance. See www.cemlawsafrica.com.