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## THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

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### **Declaration by HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the eve of World Oceans Day (2003)**

**Stockholm, Sweden**

Distinguished Participants in the fifth Religion, Science and the Environment Symposium, assembled dignitaries, scholars, communicators, leaders of congregations, members of the press and citizens of God's beautiful Earth:

Some of us are native speakers of Swedish, French, English, Finnish, Russian or Greek, and some of languages even beyond Europe.

Some of us are young, some middle-aged and some have seen many seasons come and go.

Some of us are representatives of academia, some of industry, some of public interest organizations, NGOs, some of government and intergovernmental organizations.

Some of us are Roman Catholics, some Protestant, some Jews, some Muslims, and some are Orthodox Christians.

But one thing we all share as a common heritage of humankind. We are united by water which comprises 70% of our body and 70% of the Earth's surface. All life depends on its nourishing power. Flowing water makes our planet unique among all the planets, as we know, in the universe. Water is a source of wonder and beauty, a cause of celebration and connection.

Water cradles us from our birth, sustains us in life, and heals us in sickness. It delights us in play, enlivens our spirit, purifies our body, and refreshes our mind.

We share the miracle of water with the entire community of life. Indeed, each of us is a microcosm of the oceans that sustains life. Every person here, every person in our world, is in essence a miniature ocean.

The world's oceans, coastal waters, enclosed seas and estuaries abound with the gift of life. The vast blue oceans are God's Creation no less than the land, no less than these tiny oceans, and not less than we ourselves are.

And so it is that we have gathered together to remember the oceans on this eve of World Oceans Day. World Oceans Day celebrates the largest earthly realm of God's creation.

Oceans were and are our medium of travel around the world. They link all peoples, coastal and landlocked, in study, in trade, in communication, in worship.

The oceans provide one-sixth of the animal protein consumed by humans, more so than chickens, beef, mutton or pork. Oceans generate nearly half of the oxygen we breathe and cleanse the atmosphere of much carbon dioxide that people, automobiles and power plants produce. Removing this carbon dioxide is vital because the human-caused increase of atmospheric carbon dioxide threatens our planet's biological diversity and our own human civilization.

The oceans are the earth's major shapers of climate, to whose existing patterns our societies have adapted. More than half of humanity lives within 100 kilometres of the coast, and where we live reflects our affinity for the gifts that the oceans provide. The health of the oceans is essential to human well-being, to biological diversity and to the stability of our world's climate. And the oceans are home to countless species of life, from great whales that are loved by all to tiny creatures that only God knows.

But the health of the oceans and seas is severely threatened. We overfish. We pollute. We have nearly exhausted our seas.

The Baltic Sea, on which this city is built, suffers from and is being stifled by humans. Once we were few and the sea seemed vast; but now we are exceedingly numerous, and yet the Baltic has not grown. We surround it, and this surrounded sea feels the seasonal pulse of human life. Our species has harmed the life of this beautiful and once-bountiful sea.

The Baltic Sea is a microcosm of the world's oceans. It is one of many seas bordering the interconnected basins of the world's oceans. The Baltic's waters may have originated in rain fallen over Germany or Poland or Estonia, and brought to it by a hundred rivers. Nevertheless, when these waters leave the Baltic, they will most certainly touch the tropical shores of Indonesia, the ice-bound coasts of Antarctica and the darkest waters of the Challenger Deep before the end of time. There is truly only one ocean, with all its parts interconnected, just as there is only one Spirit, which unites us all.

So what we do to the oceans, God's vast blue Creation, we also do to God's other creations, including ourselves. Once we humans did not know that we could harm God's Creation. The oceans, especially, seemed so vast as to be invulnerable.

But now we know differently. We know how fragile is our precious Earth and its oceans. We know how essential they are to sustaining our bodies, our minds, our

hearts and our spirits. And we know that the oceans, even in their vastness, are feeling the crushing burden of humans' callous ignorance.

We fish their depths to exhaustion, we fill them with pollution, we reshape their shores with little concern for their ability to endure. From the Baltic Sea to the remotest Southern Ocean seamounts, we have reduced the oceans' miraculous biodiversity.

The oceans are in peril. They cannot protect themselves. But God has endowed humankind with the knowledge to rectify our mistakes, and we are, each one of us, given the choice of what we will do.

To protect the oceans is to do God's work. To harm them, even if we are ignorant of the harm we cause, is to diminish His divine Creation. We can stop over-fishing and destructive fishing methods so that the miracle of the fishes will endure for future generations. We can stop pollution so that the seas can recover from poisoning and from life-choking nutrients produced by our cities and farms and industries. We can establish sanctuaries in the sea where we agree to do no harm of any kind.

If we can find the faith to love each other and to love God, then we can find the faith to help His vast water planet live and flourish. On this eve of World Oceans Day, we invite all of you to join us in pledging to protect the oceans as an act of devotion, whatever your religion may be. If we love God, we must love His Creation.

We thank you and we invoke upon you all the abundant grace and infinite mercy of the Divine Creator.