To : IOC Member States (Official National Coordinating Body for Liaison with the IOC in IOC Member States)

cc. : IOC Officers
Permanent Delegates/Observer Missions to UNESCO of IOC Member States
National Commissions for UNESCO of IOC Member States
Officers of Major IOC Subsidiary Bodies (Scientific, Technical and Regional)

Subject : Ministerial Round Table on Oceans, 12 and 13 October 2009, on the occasion of the 35th Session of the UNESCO General Conference.
UNESCO HQ, Paris, France

Sir/Madam,

IOC is preparing to celebrate its 50th anniversary. Since its creation IOC has served as the United Nations focal point for ocean science and ocean services in providing science-based stewardship for the ocean.

I am pleased to inform you that, during its last session (16–26 June 2009), the IOC Assembly fully endorsed the convening of a Ministerial Round Table to take place on 12 and 13 October this year on the occasion of the 35th session of the UNESCO General Conference. The main topic of the Round Table is “Building stewardship for the Ocean: the contribution of UNESCO to Responsible Ocean Governance”.

The Ocean is the ultimate global commons providing essential ecological services that make life possible on our planet. The 1982 United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides an integrated legal framework on which to build sound and effective regulations for this shared resource.

…/…
However, there are many gaps in the governance of this unique international space. Regulation of high seas or trans-zonal fisheries remains a major challenge due to unsustainable fisheries practices. Many special habitats such as mangroves, estuaries, coral-reefs and seamounts harboring hot-spots of marine biodiversity are also under threat as a result of unsustainable practices. And, the illegal trafficking of people, arms and drugs, as well as the level of current piracy at sea is increasing.

This summer a UN General Assembly Working Group of the whole (August 31–September 4, New York) will consider an initial report and a plan to conduct the first Global Integrated Assessment of the Ocean for 2014–2015, years when the Commission on Sustainable Development will review the commitments of Member States on oceans and coastal issues.

It is in this context that the Ministerial Round Table is organized.

Participating ministers will be invited to engage in open discussions in three thematic sessions:

1. The role of science and the United Nations in providing governance for the Ocean. Monday, 12 October, 2:30 p.m.–6:30 p.m.
2. The contribution of UNESCO to monitor the state of the Ocean and its ecological services: the UN Regular Process. Tuesday, 13 October, 9:30 a.m.–1:00 p.m.
3. Ocean and Climate Change, the impacts on and from the Ocean: adapting coastal cities to sea-level rise. Tuesday, 13 October, 2:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Each session will begin with an introduction by a keynote speaker, followed by two 8-minute presentations by panellists providing specific inputs on the topic of the session. A moderator will then open the floor to participating ministers for discussion and a summary of these discussions will be made for each session. Consensual points of agreement among participants will be shared with the members of the Science Commission of the 35th Session of the UNESCO General Conference in order to incorporate this input into decisions or resolutions of the General conference as appropriate.

If your country is considering to be represented at the Ministerial Round Table by a ministerial level delegation we request you to provide us by 27 August 2009 at the latest with the name of the Minister, official name of his/her office and full contact information.

Should you need further information please feel free to contact the secretariat.

Yours sincerely,

[signed]

Patricio Bernal
Assistant Director-General, UNESCO
Executive Secretary, IOC