

SciencesPo
COLLÈGE UNIVERSITAIRE

**DIVING INTO THE
HEART OF UNOC 3**
ACCOUNT OF
A DIPLOMATIC
IMMERSION FOR
UNDERGRADUATE
COLLEGE STUDENTS

TIERED - COLLECTION
AROUND STUDENTS'
WORKS

Picture : Nice, France - September 20, 2019: aerial view of the Mediterranean sea, baie des anges (Côte d'Azur) © HJBC/ Shutterstock

FRANCE
2030

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the involvement of many actors, ten Sciences Po students from the Undergraduate College were able to do an internship at the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3) in June 2025. The Undergraduate College thus would like to thank the City of Nice, Anne de Blic, Secretary General of the UN Ocean Conference, Olivier Poivre d'Arvor, Special Envoy of the French President of the Republic for the UN Ocean Conference, Louis Terriou, head of mission at the UNOC-3 Secretariat General, the Directors of the three concerned campuses (Menton, Poitiers et Le Havre) - particularly the Director of the Menton campus, Mr Youssef Halaoua, for his implication - as well as Marie-Hélène Caitucoli, executive Director of the TIERED project. This project created the Sciences Po Institute for environmental transformations, which contributed to organize the students' participation to UNOC-3.

UNITED NATIONS OCEAN CONFERENCE NICE, FRANCE

大会
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CONFÉRENCE
DES NATIONS UNIES
SUR L'Océan
NICE, FRANCE 2025

CONFÉRENCE OON
Océan
NICE, FRANCE 2025



Third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) © Elias
Ménager



ABOUT UNOC

From June 9 to 13 2025, the City of Nice welcomed the third United Nations Ocean Conference, co-organized by France and Costa Rica. This landmark event brought together over 12,000 delegates and nearly 130,000 visitors (world leaders, scientists, international organizations, civil society, the private sector etc.) around a shared commitment to strengthen regulations regarding the **protection and sustainable management of the world's oceans**.

Held 10 years after the COP21 and the Paris Agreement, the conference served as a milestone in the reaffirmation and deepening of international cooperation on ocean-related challenges. Discussions centred around three priorities:

- Strengthening ocean protection through multilateral mechanisms
- Financing Sustainable Development Goal 14 - "Life Below Water" and promoting a sustainable blue economy
- Supporting political decision-making through improved production and dissemination of scientific knowledge.

10 Sciences Po Bachelor students from the three campuses concerned by the Seas and Ocean Certification worked with different UN teams during the Conference. Their accounts offer a clear, sensible and sometimes critical perspective on the reality of an international summit and the contribution of their education to a better understanding of substantive debates.



A VARIETY OF TASKS, FROM PROTOCOL AND COORDINATION TO FIELD DIPLOMACY

Several students worked with the **Protocol and Liaison Service** of the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management, such as Alexia Puiiu, Ema Monachon and Charlotte Nasser-Belaud-Rotureau. Alexia Puiiu, Protocol Assistant, sums up her experience as follows: *"Protocol is, in large part, about managing the unexpected. [...] No textbook can fully prepare someone for the nuances of protocol work, which requires not only knowledge of formal diplomatic norms, but also the ability to read situations in real-time and respond with discretion, sensitivity and calm under pressure"*.

AN ESSENTIAL DEPARTMENT

Volunteers in the service were mobilized for the plenary sessions, escorting heads of state and ministers, checking the order of speeches, and ensuring that the sessions ran smoothly. The protocol service is essential given the numerous last-minute changes during plenary sessions due to participants' busy schedules.

Elias Menager, Meeting Services Assistant at the DGACM, supervised the conferences taking place in the side events rooms, as did Lara Harmankaya, Stakeholder Management Assistant at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). Students were sometimes impressed with the level of protocol of the conference, and surprised by their **degree of responsibility** *"We were both surprised and honoured to learn that we would be personally welcoming and escorting Heads of State, Heads of Government and Ministers."* (Charlotte Nasser-Belaud-Rotureau)

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Conferences and interactions with other participants reminded students of their courses at Sciences Po, followed in particular in the framework of the **Seas and ocean Certification**. This common knowledge base allowed them to have the necessary distance to better seize UNOC's stakes, both in terms of content and critically in terms of its operational scope. *"Concepts that once lived primarily in readings and lectures—global governance, actor asymmetries, North–South dynamics,*

tensions between multilateralism and the rise of "minilateral" decision-making—suddenly felt tangible. I wasn't just hearing about institutional arrangements or power imbalances in theory anymore; I was hearing how they shaped lives, blocked action, or forced adaptation on the ground."(Alexia Puiiu).

Ema Monachon was particularly struck by the **North-South dynamics** in the plenary session, which reminded her of her 20th-century history class, particularly the non-aligned movement, and how the unequal power structures established during the colonial period and the Cold War continue to shape international relations. *"Indeed, several delegations from countries often identified with the Global South, frequently asked whether their leaders could be seated closer to the front of the plenary, despite the alphabetical seating rule applied to all. In contrast, more prominent or traditionally influential countries rarely made such requests. [...] These interactions show how much importance some states place on visibility within international forums, as a means of asserting their presence on the global stage."*

Victorine Bouchet, Messenger at the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), also attests to the **practical relevance of these teachings**: *"I had the opportunity to attend several particularly enriching panels, which resonated with the seminar 'The global ocean space and its environmental, economic, climatic, and geopolitical challenges,' taught by Ms. Nathalie de Pompignan. This seminar addresses, in particular, the importance of coral reefs and the catastrophic impact of plastic waste on marine ecosystems. It also includes a legal approach, studying the international conventions and treaties governing the oceans."* ■

THE CONFERENCE'S MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS

Although the conference followed a defined procedure to reach consensus, the students noted the **importance of private and informal interactions outside the main plenary sessions**. The plenary session was perceived as having more of a symbolic role, providing each country with a formal platform to publicly express their position, reaffirm their commitment, and raise awareness of ocean issues.

UNOC'S DIPLOMATIC SUCCESSES

The increasing number of ratifications of the **BBNJ Treaty** ("Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction"), could signal a consensus on the urgency of ocean protection. This treaty, strongly supported by the French diplomacy, was ratified by 19 countries at UNOC-3, bringing the total to 50 (60 ratifications are required for the treaty to enter into force in January 2026).

But the BBNJ Treaty is not the only success of UNOC 3, as Lara Harmankaya explains: *"From Tanzania's commitment to two new Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Pemba Island to the Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity (UBPP) initiative, spearheaded by the 22 members of the Pacific Community to conserve 100% of the Blue Pacific Continent [...], witnessing real diplomatic willingness to take immediate action made this conference worthwhile. I was pleased to see that the obligation to change the status quo of inaction was now the norm."*

AN OPEN AND INCLUSIVE CONFERENCE

Side events were characterized by their interdisciplinarity and the **diversity** of contributors. Victorine Bouchet states: *"The side event entitled Strengthening Multi-Level Governance for Sustainable Ocean Action, bringing together the governor of Valparaíso (Chile), a representative from Ecuador, and an elected official from the city of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), particularly caught my attention. These three politicians expressed their desire to promote 'blue schools', programs aimed at*

*reconnecting children with the oceans from an early age. They also emphasized the **importance of social inclusion in the fight against climate change** and the need to rehabilitate indigenous knowledge and traditions that were marginalized during the colonial period."*

Furthermore, the **active presence of small island states** made a particularly strong impression, as Lara Harmankaya points out, noting that these countries are setting an example by making significant commitments. *"[...] the staunchest protectors of the ocean at UNOC3 were arguably the Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Impacted the most by sea level rises, delegates and officials from countries like the Maldives were vocal about ocean inequities manifesting in economic, environmental and governmental affairs, such as unequal access to ocean resources, marine pollution and little representation in global diplomacy. Despite being among the first to sign and ratify the BBNJ, they are also historically the least exploitative. ."*

Finally, the conference involved not only world leaders but also a **wider audience**, according to Ema Monachon. *"Indeed, the conference also created a space that encouraged popular awareness and education. When I had the opportunity to visit La Baleine, I was impressed by the pavilions that brought together numerous organisations such as Fondation Tara Océan and La Fresque du Plastique. These groups all offered creative and immersive activities that helped translate complex marine issues into a much more accessible and engaging content. [...] I believe that these initiatives played a crucial role in raising public awareness, showing how mobilising people doesn't have to rely exclusively on alarming discourse, but can also come from curiosity and positive engagement."*

Finally, students were pleasantly surprised by the **diversity and accessibility of those present**, both professionals and volunteers. ■

TEACHINGS OF THE CONFERENCE

Despite the overall success of the Conference, several limitations were identified by the students, which could provide avenues for action for future conferences. In their view, the absence of global economic powers such as the United States was a major obstacle to achieving a moratorium on deep-sea mining and the 30x30 target (the protection of 30% of marine and terrestrial areas by 2030).

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT FOR THE FUTURE

The central issue for some students was the gap between statements and implementation, due to the **absence of binding obligations**. In addition, students questioned certain practices that did not correspond to the values of the conference: high absenteeism outside of the opening and closing days and during speeches considered less important, frequent air travel by delegations, air-conditioned conference rooms, etc.

The fact that most of the discussions took place outside of the plenary session may also have excluded some small countries from the negotiations. Finally, the conference could benefit from more media coverage.

A CHANCE FOR THE OCEAN

Despite the limitations raised by the students, they are aware of the **diplomatic success and positive impact** of such a conference on maritime and ocean issues. Elias Ménager *"I would like to thank the governments and the UN for co-organizing this third UN Ocean Conference with France and Costa Rica. This shows that SDG 14, and therefore the seas and the ocean, are important to the international community: such summits are not yet organized for all Sustainable Development Goals."*

Students are also aware of how fortunate they are to have been able to attend the conference and observe diplomacy in action.

A DECISIVE MOMENT FOR THE STUDENTS' CAREER CHOICES

For some, this immersion reinforced career plans; for others, it reoriented their aspirations.

Victorine Bouchet: *"Thanks to the discussions I had with various professionals, I discovered organizations such as Tara and Blum, as well as regional policy makers, which I can now see myself working with. [...] Another common thread among several of the career paths which inspired me was the civil service exam, which I had not initially considered."*

Charlotte Nasser-Belaud-Rotureau: *"During UNOC 3, I realised how much I appreciated working in this field, because of the themes discussed, but also because of what the United Nations represents. Despite its limitations, the UN remains one of the few platforms where States, civil society, researchers, and youth can come together around a shared objective: protecting our planet and promoting the common good. [...]"*

Lara Harmankaya : *"At a time of growing individualism and disillusionment, the main takeaway I left with was the comforting thought that the 'collective' has not disappeared, and that I could indeed dedicate the rest of my life to it."*

MESSAGES TO THE GOVERNMENTS : FOR A SUSTAINABLE DIPLOMACY

While UNOC3 has led to symbolic and diplomatic progress, students stress the urgent need to make these conferences more inclusive, more grounded in reality, and more environmentally consistent.

Alexia Puiui: *"One overarching reflection that emerged from these interactions is the urgent need for **more inclusive and meaningful engagement with civil society, NGOs, and indigenous communities.**"*

For Ema Monachon, *"ocean governance must prioritise implementation, strengthen compliance mechanisms, and also ensure the inclusion of coastal communities, indigenous peoples, and small island states who are the most directly affected."* ■



Interns at UNOC-3. Credits : Elias Ménager



Signing of the BBNJ Treaty at UNOC-3. Credits : Elias Ménager

FIND OUT MORE

For more information on the commitment of Sciences Po's student and research communities to maritime and ocean issues, here is a [link](#) to a **video broadcast during the UNOC**, which includes interviews with researchers and students who have completed the "Seas and ocean Certification" program, and highlights the crucial role of humanities and social sciences in this field, calling for action. This video was produced as part of the Institute for Environmental Transformations (TIERED). ■

ZOOM ON THE SEAS AND OCEAN CERTIFICATION

The "Seas and ocean" Certification is open to students on Le Havre, Menton and Poitiers campuses. This Certification is conceived as an addition to the bachelor's degree. It is an asset to help students choose their master's degree and plan their professional project. Designed as a multidisciplinary introduction to maritime and coastal issues, it allows students to enhance their skills and knowledge on these topics. For more information, please visit the Certification [page](#).

THE UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE

The Sciences Po Undergraduate College is made up of a network of seven campuses: Dijon, Le Havre, Menton, Nancy, Paris, Poitiers and Reims. It offers undergraduate degree programmes and admits students with a baccalauréat or equivalent school-leaving qualification. After three years, students graduate with a Bachelor of Arts and may go on to a Master's programme at Sciences Po or another institution in France or abroad, or go straight into the workforce.

THE TIERED PROJECT

Funded for 10 years, TIERED - Transforming Interdisciplinary Education and Research for Evolving Democracies, a strategic project for Sciences Po, was launched in January 2023 to meet the challenges posed to democratic systems by environmental and digital transformations. TIERED is funded by a French government grant managed by the Agence nationale de la recherche under the France 2030 program, under reference ANR-22-EXES-014. TIERED has namely created the Institute for environmental transformations which helped organize the Undergraduate College students' participation to UNOC-3.

PUBLICATION MANAGER

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