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**Two continents, one purpose:  
defeating Illegal Fishing**

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In October 2000, in the sub-Antarctic waters of the Indian Ocean, the fishing vessel Amur sank while illegally fishing for Patagonian tooth fish - a delicacy destined to Japanese and American dining tables.

Structural modifications had made the boat unseaworthy; life-saving equipment on board did not function; there was an absence of fire extinguishers; and escape routes were blocked.

Eventually most of the crew were rescued by a vessel in the vicinity – but not before 14 of them had frozen to death.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is one of many horrific stories linked to illegal fishing in this day and age. I want to thank you all, and especially the students in the audience, for devoting your attention to this issue today. I am delighted to be here.

I will do my best to bring you my perspective – the European perspective – on one of the most serious threats to the sustainable management of fish stocks.

There's three things I'd like to do with you this morning: first describe the scope of the problem to you. Then show you how Europe has been tackling it. We had adopted recently a new package of legislation on control and enforcement so I can bring you a note of optimism that we are on the right track. Finally, I will address the global dimension and the way forward as I see it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Illegal fishing is a criminal activity.

Imagine a 100 mile-long fishing line that takes no account of protected species or vulnerable habitats; that lures even sea-birds to their death; and that manages to place several species at risk at the same time.

That is how bad the impact of illegal fishing is on the environment. It upsets ecosystems, endangers species, reduces biodiversity; and it undermines all our conservation efforts.

But there's more. This is not just a crime against the environment. By reducing catches for the rest of the sector, the practice causes lower revenues and job losses and disrupts markets with unfair competition.

At the end of the day, illegal fishing affects the whole economy of the fisheries sector.

But there's more. Life on a fishing vessel is difficult and often hazardous as it is. Yet the dangers become significantly worse if you work on vessels operating for purely financial gain. These vessels will seek to avoid the expenses associated with safety and sanitary conditions, maintenance, training or insurance.

The consequences can be tragic, as the story of the Amur sadly shows.

But there's more: do you think that vessels fishing illegally will shy away from engaging in other criminal activities?

Of course not, ladies and gentlemen.

According to a recent report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, those very same vessels will often also be involved in trafficking humans, drugs, weapons... and even in terrorism.

In other words, illegal fishing concerns us all. It is a form of organised crime with socio-economic consequences. These consequences reach far beyond the fishing sector or the environment. They touch upon issues of justice, human rights and global governance.

Maritime law-enforcement agencies seem to be up against criminal organisation, with tentacles in many ports all over the world. This is what makes our combat difficult. This is why it needs to be fought through concerted international action.

As a key player in world fisheries, the EU has no intention to remain idle. Indeed in the past few years we have been working on several fronts.

First of all, at EU level, we have since 2010 a new set of rules on traceability, marketing, control and enforcement. This applies to all EU nationals, wherever they fish, and to all products traded into the EU. We are now putting a lot of effort into having all our Member States and all trading partner implement the new rules correctly.

An interesting element of this new regulation is the 'catch certificate'. Every fishery product entering the EU must come with a certificate guaranteeing that they were caught in line with regional and international rules on conservation – a sort of 'marine passport', as it were, showing where the fish come from.

We try to apply strict controls along every step of the supply chain to make sure that the 'passports' are genuine. This way, all the fish imported into the EU can be traceable "from the net to the plate". Illegally-caught products can no longer reach the EU market or any market supplied by the EU.

The countries which do not adopt the certification system won't be able to do business with the EU: imports from them will be banned. Vessels, on the other hand, will end up on a EU black list if found to break the law.

And we don't just investigate vessels. We can prosecute EU nationals, operating under any flag and in any waters. And we have strict sanctions applying to individuals too.

Speaking of sanctions, on this we can take example from the US, where a Spanish vessel was recently fined 5 million dollars for fishing illegally in American waters. This is what I call a deterring sanction!

Our new system is already bringing about concrete result. Coupled with strong sanctions, we are confident this will provide a strong deterrent.

However, much remains to be done.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If the battle against illegal fishing goes hand in hand with the ambition of sustainability, Europe's battle today goes hand in hand with a review of our fisheries policy.

In the EU we urgently need to tackle a legacy of overfishing, discard and by-catch practices. Because reform had become a necessity, I have recently launched a process of fundamental change in the fisheries domain.

When the adoption process is completed in a couple of years, we hope the reform will be as groundbreaking as the Magnuson-Stevens Act was for America in 2006. That was really great work, that changed the landscape of fisheries management for good!

Our proposals have very much in common with your rules, such as the use of annual catch limits and accountability measures, market-based fishery management programs, a larger role for science and increased international cooperation.

We are going for a simpler, greener and more region-specific policy.

'Simpler', because our system had become overly complex.

'Greener', because environmental sustainability comes first.

'Region-specific', because each sea basin is different and we can't have a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

No matter how much progress we make domestically, if our neighbour keeps plundering the seas, then all our legal and moral obligations and all our conservation efforts will be useless.

Illegal fishing is a global problem. It affects virtually all countries and all continents. In the words of an Australian Senator: "Russian vessels with Spanish crews are being coordinated by Chinese companies and selling fish on the international market" – it's just an example, of course.

The only way to tackle this effectively is for the main market powers to join forces and act as one.

The solution to illegal fishing lies in concerted international action.

This is the main front for us today. It is the main message I want to bring you. To the young people present here today I say – and I'm sure their professors will agree with me: please understand this is a pressing international issue. As serious, dedicated students of international affairs, you have to be aware of it.

The EU cooperates with other international partners, but the relationship with the United States is particularly valuable to us. Our authorities meet on a regular basis to exchange views and best practices, and we share the same principles and values when it comes to strengthening our combat in international fora.

We work with each other, but also with the industries, stakeholders and scientists and to devise the best ways to defeating illegal fishing.

The aim of my visit, and of the joint statement that Undersecretary Lubchenko and I signed yesterday, is to promote and reinforce our cooperation. Like the EU, the United States are one of the main market powers in fishery trade and we want to find even more ways to work together. We are both active players within regional management organisations and international organisations, but we think that, together, we have a better chance to expand our philosophy and cover all fisheries in the world.

The Pacific Ocean, for example, holds the largest reserve of tuna, but little progress has been made to preserve stocks and control fishing activities. Most of the countries in the region do not yet have an Action Plan to combat illegal fishing.

In the Indian Ocean efficient measures to fight this criminal activity are still to be developed.

As responsible flag States, we must make it our duty to assist those countries in their fight against illegal fishing. Their fight is our fight.

I mentioned earlier that the catch certification scheme we have introduced in the EU is proving quite effective.

As a next concrete step, we intend to develop this idea with our international partners through the United Nations and the adequate regional management fisheries organisations.

Our vision is to bring about a worldwide catch certification scheme.

We are convinced that a worldwide programme would bring about a fair trade in fisheries products; it would foster an international commitment to combat crime; and it would ultimately bring us closer to responsible fishing and sustainable world fisheries.

To conclude, ladies and Gentlemen,

A recent report by the European Parliament says illegal fishing accounts for an astonishing 19 percent of world-wide catches.

Environmental NGOs talk about 13 to 31 percent of global catches, and a value of 10 to 23 billion dollars each year!

But of course illegal fishing is a clandestine activity, and its true extent is actually hard to ascertain.

For the European Union, the way forward is clear: we need to improve governance, enforce the rules, and eradicate illegal fishing through international cooperation.

"Zero tolerance" is very high on the European agenda. Now we must find every opportunity to work together towards global zero tolerance on illegal fishing.

Yesterday the EU and the USA have sent the international community, fishermen and stakeholders a strong message that we are serious about protecting seas and oceans around the world – and I for one am very proud of this.

We have a common purpose: promoting responsible fishing at global level.

At the same time, I am painfully aware that this is just the beginning. We are up against cartels with worldwide ramifications. We can't spare any effort if we are to defeat them.

So I urge all of you - political leaders, analysts, NGOs, industry representatives, scholars, students and teachers of this eminent University....: join us and multiply knowledge, public awareness and initiatives on this issue.

The ocean challenge is not one that any leader, any country or any continent can tackle alone.

Thank you for your attention.