

## A WORD FROM THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, ECOLOGY, SEA AND FOREST



« When the last tree is cut down, the last fish eaten,  
and the last stream poisoned, you will realise  
that you cannot eat money ».

This quote from the Chief of Seattle in 1854 rings so true and significant, showing us how important it is to protect our environment.

I unequivocally qualify all actions directed at preserving our environment to be among the most responsible initiatives and a sacred duty to all humans. Organising this Humpback Whale World Congress is one such endeavour ...

Marine mammals are iconic species that play an important part in the ecological balance of the marine environment, but also in the cultural lives of coastal populations. They play an important economic role in countries with strong maritime ties such as Madagascar.

Despite the fundamental contributions they provide, marine mammals are under constant threat arising from various sources such as commercial hunting, accidental catches, collisions with ships, competition with industrial fisheries on feeding grounds, degradation of marine and coastal habitats, marine pollution and the perverse effects of climate change.

Ever since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982, Madagascar has been constantly committed to protecting marine mammals in waters under its jurisdiction and has strived to have the Indian Ocean maintain its status as one of the world's sanctuaries for marine mammals.

I proudly recognise the work accomplished by Cetamada which has risen to the challenge of organising this International Congress on humpback whales in Madagascar, with the contribution of eminent experts on humpback whales and the key theme, ever present in our country's national priorities: "The Humpback Whale, Conservation and Development Lever".

This international congress will no doubt provide unique opportunities for foreign and Malagasy scientists, present at Sainte Marie, to exchange scientific data on the status of conservation of humpback whales around Madagascar and throughout the Indian Ocean, and developing new ways to provide better protection for these marine mammals. This Congress also underlines the consolidation of a rich ongoing collaboration in matters of scientific research in the Southwest Indian Ocean with a view on conserving biological resources in our region.

Besides Madagascar's commitment to conserving marine mammals, better protection for whales guarantees preservation of "whale watching" based ecotourism as well as sustainability of its economic benefits to the population.

I would finally like to add "Tongasoa and an excellent Congress" to all, and also wish Cetamada continued success in its sacred mission of protecting marine mammals and their habitat in Madagascar.

**RALAVA BEBOARIMISA**  
**MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT,**  
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