



22 September 2016

To the attendees of the High-Level Event 10x20 Initiative on Marine Protected Areas Achieving the Promise to Protect the Oceans and Seas.

Statement on behalf of Sir Richard Branson, Founder of the Virgin Group:

Thank you so much for inviting me to participate with you today. I can't be with you in New York, as I'm currently in Italy, participating in the month-long Virgin Strive challenge, which is raising money for Big Change, a which equips young people with the skills, experiences and support to develop a growth mindset. The challenge involves a 70km hike in Northern Italy, a cycle to the Southern tip of Italy, swim to Sicily and mountain bike, trail and climb ending at mouth of Mount Etna's great volcanic caldera.

The Strive Challenge is about each of us challenging ourselves to do more and inspiring others to challenge themselves to do more. So, I could think of no better way to celebrate World Oceans Day this year than to challenge my great friend Adrian Grenier to join me by making a huge splash as part of this challenge, a splash we want heard around the world, to restore ocean health. Since then, over 200 million photographs and tweets have been posted on Twitter and Instagram from people all around the world, celebrating their love for the Ocean with us.

On September 27th, less than a week from today, we'll be taking on that challenge and swimming across the Strait of Messina for nearly 4 kilometers to raise awareness for global Ocean conservation action.

The ocean stretches 1000's of kilometers in depth and breadth around the world, it's a huge, amazing system that powers our planet, but it is in trouble from overfishing, pollution and climate change. Just last week in Washington at Secretary Kerry's Our Ocean conference, a number of governments, big and small that touch every ocean stepped up and committed to more marine protected areas, combatting illegal fishing, removing plastics from the Ocean and doing more to address ocean acidification. We need to see even more leadership – more vision, courage and character when it comes to protecting this wonderful Earth system. Governments need to meet the SDG and CBD goals of protecting 10% of the ocean by 2020 and together strive to do even more and meet the scientifically recommended target of protecting 30% of the Ocean by 2030.

Part of completing the Virgin Strive Challenge means setting a growth mindset - to challenge and push ourselves, to reach outside of our comfort zones, because that helps us all grow as people. For the Ocean, we all need to adopt this same mindset, do much more to restore ocean health, and work together to drive change at scale. Please join me and Adrian in making a splash for our oceans and working as hard as possible to secure more marine protected areas in every Ocean and Sea.