

Opening speech of Nikhil Seth
EGM Oceans, Seas and Sustainable Development:
Implementation and follow-up to Rio+20
New York, 18 April 2013 at 9 am

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Experts and Colleagues,

On behalf of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and its Division for Sustainable Development, I am indeed pleased to welcome you all at this *Expert Group Meeting on Oceans, Seas and Sustainable Development: Implementation and follow-up to Rio+20*.

Mr. Hongbo Wu, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, conveys his warmest greetings and best wishes for a productive exchange of information and experiences.

Oceans, covering 72 per cent of the Earth's surface, support life, drive the climate and hydrological cycles and provide vital resources. They are critical for global food security, for sustainable economic prosperity and the well-being of many national economies, particularly in developing countries.

Fish and fishery products represent a very valuable source of protein and essential micronutrients for balanced nutrition and good health. In 2009, fish accounted for 16.6 percent of the world population's intake of animal protein and 6.5 percent of all protein consumed. Coral-reef fish species also represent an important source of protein and contribute about one quarter of the total fish catch on average in developing countries. A

healthy and effectively managed coral reef can produce 5 to 15 tons of fish and seafood per square kilometer per year.

Apart from food and livelihood provision, oceans represent a natural resource with respect to the travel and tourism, mining, telecommunication and transportation industries. In addition, some marine species have been analysed and tested for pharmaceutical use, among others in the area of cancer, HIV and malaria treatment.

Despite their economic, social and environmental benefits, oceans, seas and their related ecosystems are facing numerous local and global threats caused by human activity and climate change.

Today, 85% of the world's fisheries are either fully exploited, over exploited, depleted, or recovering from depletion. About one fifth of the global coral reefs have already been damaged beyond repair and it is predicted that 35 per cent will be lost within the next 20 to 40 years if no change occurs. Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, oceans have become 30 per cent more acidic and predictions show that by 2050, ocean acidity could even increase by 150 per cent - with devastating effects on marine ecosystems.

Ensuring healthy and productive oceans is therefore crucial for achieving sustainable development.

The Rio+20 Conference was a significant milestone on the path to sustainable development. The comprehensive chapter on oceans and seas in the Rio+20 outcome

document was seen as a success and represents an excellent starting point for ongoing deliberations in the post-Rio+20 processes. Rio+20 aimed at shared prosperity on a shared planet, which will hopefully lead to a post-2015 development agenda with sustainable development at its heart.

Another key outcome of the Rio+20 Conference was the launch of an intergovernmental process to develop sustainable development goals which are to address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their inter-linkages. Several Member States in response to a questionnaire on the sustainable development goals mentioned oceans as one of the priority areas to be taken into account. In addition, the summary of the recent Meeting of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda in Bali, Indonesia mentioned "healthy and productive oceans" under the topic "protection of the global environment". These are very encouraging signals that demonstrate the importance of oceans and seas for sustainable development and while it may not be easy to fashion a universally acceptable SDG on oceans, it warrants serious consideration in the process ahead.

The Conference also agreed to the establishment of a universal high level political forum on sustainable development, with the intent of convening the first forum at the beginning of the 68th session of the GA in September 2013. The forum is meant to be built on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and replacing the Commission. To date, it is unclear which topics will be picked up by the HLPF, but due to the importance at Rio+20 oceans and seas are likely to be one of the topics discussed in the future.

The Secretary-General also highlighted the importance of oceans and seas in the Five-Year Action Agenda for his second term in office (2012-2016) and his recently launched Oceans Compact.

UNDESA, in collaboration with other partners, is actively engaged in supporting ongoing post-Rio+20 processes. In addition, USG Wu has been appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General as Secretary-General of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in 2014 where the topic of oceans is expected to figure prominently.

Sustainable development requires a holistic perspective and an inclusive decision making process that involves government and business leaders, as well as the other stakeholders. I am indeed pleased to see that this meeting brings together different stakeholders, including representatives from Member States and UN agencies as well as experts from academic institutions, civil society and non-government groups in order to discuss and exchange ideas on the possible implementation of Rio+20.

We very much welcome the engagement and continuous efforts of all actors of the oceans community with regard to the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and seas.

I wish all of you an interesting meeting.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.