

Opening Remarks
by H.E. Mr Peter Thomson,
President of the 71st Session of the General Assembly
Preparatory Meeting of the Ocean Conference
Monday 15 February 2017

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden
Honourable Minister for Fisheries of Fiji
Under-Secretary-General Wu of UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs and
Secretary General of the Conference
[USG DGACM
ASG FOR LEGAL AFFAIRS]
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome everyone to this Preparatory Meeting for The Ocean Conference, and a very special welcome and thanks to those who have travelled such long distances to be here today.

Your presence, the large number of registered observers for the meeting, the many side events that are being held - all this energy, gives me great hope for the successful implementation of SDG14. Just yesterday we concluded two days of discussions on Ocean issues at the annual hearing of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Everywhere I turn these days I find countries, agencies and organisations engaged in discussions about supporting the noble aims of SDG14.

We have got momentum. We have raised the global consciousness on the need for action on Ocean's parlous condition. Now we must press on relentlessly to realise in full the vision of SDG 14.

When leaders from across Governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and the scientific and academic communities, gather together in New York, from 5 – 9 June for The Ocean Conference, we will be witness to a turning point. We will witness the point in history when humanity truly began the process of reversing the cycle of decline that accumulated human activity has brought upon the Ocean.

During the course of the next two days you will hear more comprehensively from others on the extent of the woes we have put upon the Ocean.

Marine pollution is cluttering the Ocean and choking our marine-life, while immense gyres of garbage circulate out in the high seas. It is estimated we dump the equivalent of one garbage truck of plastic into the Ocean every minute.

Hypoxic dead zones are growing along our coasts, and overfishing and IUU fishing are threatening the sustainability of fish stocks. Indeed, nearly one-third of all fish stocks are already below sustainable levels.

The impacts of climate change are aggravating the situation, by raising sea levels, exacerbating Ocean acidification, bleaching coral reefs, and increasing global water temperatures to the detriment of people's habitats, food security, livelihoods, and well-being. As you will hear today and tomorrow the list of woes goes on.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Given sufficient vision, resources and will power, every human-induced problem has a human-induced solution. SDG14 is humanity's solution to the great problems the Ocean is facing.

SDG14 was universally adopted by all 193 Member States of the United Nations in September 2015. The Ocean Conference that has since been mandated by the United Nations to support the implementation of SDG14, is the first step down the road to Ocean's recovery.

Presided over by the Governments of Sweden and Fiji, the Ocean Conference will bring together concerned representatives of humanity, from across Governments, international agencies and organisations, civil society, the private sector, the scientific and academic communities, to guide us all down that road to recovery.

The discussions you hold this week, and the networks and partnerships you build will lay the foundations upon which the Conference will stand.

Your work on the 'Call for Action' declaration that will capture the universal political commitment of the Conference must focus on our common purpose of faithfully implementing SDG14.

Your work on the themes for the seven partnership dialogues to be convened during the Conference must focus on what is required for the common good, namely a comprehensive coverage of the various targets of SDG14.

It is in this regard I am heartened by the knowledge that you will give your full support to the Permanent Representatives of Singapore and Portugal who will lead proceedings with the wisdom and efficiency for which they are well known.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman

As you know, the Conference outcomes will include the Call to Action and a conference report that will in effect constitute our work-plan for the next phase of SDG14 implementation.

A third outcome, and one on which I place great emphasis, is the Registry for Voluntary Commitments that will be launched on the conference website this very day. The voluntary commitments that will fill the registry between now and the end of the Conference will be sourced from and all concerned partnerships and parties; and I include in the latter any human being who cares about life in the Ocean and wants to take positive action. The voluntary commitments registry will be a compilation of humanity's best efforts to implement the noble targets of SDG14.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman

I urge all of you here today to commit yourselves to the work required over the next two days of this preparatory meeting, and indeed over the next four months as we approach The Ocean Conference. We are this morning on the threshold of a process that will shape our world for the better. We cannot afford to stumble.

The clear vision and steadfast purpose that created the Conference, and the SDG that it supports, must stay true. Keep faithfully to our common purpose and we **WILL** reverse the cycle of decline in which the Ocean is currently caught. We have the critical mass and the momentum behind us now to ensure the vision of SDG14 sees us through to fulfilment in 2030.

In our work over the next two days we must keep our vision clear, we must universalise our efforts, we must maintain the momentum towards the transformative commitments that will emerge from the Ocean Conference in June.

Our efforts at this time and in the years ahead, will determine whether our children, and all those who come after them will know the joy and the sustenance of the Ocean's bounty that was provided to us in our youth. Let us not deny them that bounty.

I wish you all the best for your deliberations at this preparatory meeting.

I thank you.