

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OPENING OF THE OCEAN CONFERENCE**

5 June 2017

Honourable Co-Presidents,

Prime Minister Bainimarama of Fiji and Deputy Prime Minister Lövin of Sweden,

Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Secretary-General of the Conference

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentleman,

On behalf of the General Assembly of the United Nations, welcome all! Welcome to humanity's great hall, to the assembly place of 'we the peoples' of Planet Earth.

From across the continents and over the mighty Ocean, I welcome Heads of State, Heads of Government, Ministers and all other High-Level representatives including those from Civil Society, the Private Sector, the Scientific Community and others who have travelled from afar to be here today.

That so many of you, so distinguished, so eminent in the affairs of the world, and indeed in the affairs of the Ocean, have gathered here, is already a great message of empowerment and hope.

Welcome all!

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In most probability, this conference represents the best opportunity we will ever have to reverse the cycle of decline that human activity has placed the Ocean.

The veracity of that proposition rests on the fact that SDG14, the Ocean's goal, is humanity's only universally agreed measure to conserve and sustainably manage the resources of the Ocean.

In September 2015, the world's leaders representing all 193 Member States of the United Nations, adopted SDG14 as an integral part of the transformative and universal 2030 Agenda.

Our task at this conference is to ensure that SDG14 receives the support necessary to meet its critical targets. To do that we need to hear the truth about the state of the Ocean, we need to learn about the difficulties it is facing, and most importantly, and we have to assemble the solutions required to overcome those problems. We are here on behalf of humanity to restore sustainability, balance and respect to our relationship with our primal mother, the source of all life, the Ocean.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The time has come for us to correct our wrongful ways. It is inexcusable that humanity tips the equivalent of a large garbage truck of plastic into the Ocean every minute of every day.

We have unleashed a plague of plastic upon the Ocean that is defiling nature in so many tragic ways.

Illegal and destructive fishing practices, along with harmful fisheries subsidies, are driving our fish-stocks to tipping points of collapse.

All the while, the greenhouse gases of accumulated carbon- combusting human activity are not only driving climate change, they are causing rising sea levels through Ocean warming, while threatening life in the Ocean through acidification and deoxygenation.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The central conclusion for humankind at this time is clear: if we want a secure future for our species on this planet, we have to act now on the health of the Ocean and on Climate Change.

The good news is that we have already taken decisive action. We put in place SDG14 within the 2030 Agenda. Remedial Ocean action is getting underway. And we have ratified the Paris Climate Agreement. Remedial climate action is already underway!

We now live in the years of action and implementation. These are the years when we must demonstrate fidelity to our two life-saving agreements; the years when we cease to steal from the future of our grandchildren.

The great mass of humanity, and the governments that lead us, are indeed staying true to the remedial path we have set.

And when it comes to Ocean's health, the commencement of The Ocean Conference here at the United Nations today is firm evidence of our commitment to action.

Throughout the long lead-up to The Ocean Conference, our mantra has been, 'human induced problems have human devised solutions'.

Thus from here we will push on to the maturation of our SDG14 targets of 2020, 2025 and 2030.

We will follow-up with diligence on the commitments made here at The Ocean Conference; all along, holding ourselves responsible to bequeath a conserved and sustainably managed Ocean to the stewards of the future.

From our deliberations in plenary, from the partnership dialogues and from the multitude of interactions of this conference, we will draw up the solutions to the woes we have imposed on the Ocean.

We will make this great conference the time to which those good stewards of the future will look back on as the turning point, the moment when we began the reversal of that cycle of decline of the Ocean.

We have five intensely eventful days before us in which to achieve this historic aim. Let us make each day count.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The Ocean Conference is begun!