

Keynote Address
H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson,
President of the General Assembly for the 71st Session

Session 12:
Review of implementation SDG 14
Thursday, 13 July 2017, 11:00-13:00, Conference Room 4

Ambassador Skoog of Sweden,
Ambassador Daunivalu of Fiji,
Under-Secretary-General Wu,
Under-Secretary-General Soares,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I welcome the occasion of addressing the High Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development on the subject of the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, the Ocean goal. Before saying anything further on the subject, I would like to pay tribute to the governments of Sweden and Fiji for the steadfast, generous and meaningful way in which they hosted The Ocean Conference held here at the UN last month. That tribute extends to the conference's two key authorities: Under-Secretary-General Wu and Under-Secretary-General Soares. As we say in Fijian "Vinaka vaka levu". And as we say in Swedish "tack så mycket".

As you are aware, the inclusion of SDG14 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was a recognition of humanity's existential relationship with the Ocean. It was also a recognition that the Ocean's health was in trouble, as reflected in declining fish stocks, coastal degradation, marine pollution and phenomena such as Ocean acidification and Ocean warming.

In its 70th session, the General Assembly mandated The Ocean Conference to support the implementation of SDG14. The mandate sought to build partnership within the global Ocean community to ensure success in achieving the targets of SDG14.

The Ocean Conference presented us with the best possible opportunity to dramatically raise global consciousness on the Ocean's problems, to provide a universal push for solutions to these problems, and to forge a global movement that would be capable of taking us to success in the implementation of SDG14 by the time of its maturation in the year 2030.

Measured against these objectives, The Ocean Conference proved to be a major success.

Above all, the conference showed that we are all in this together; that when it comes to the Ocean, there is no "them and us"; we all sink or swim as one.

Although it is still too early to tell, many believe that The Ocean Conference will prove to be the time when the tide turned on humanity's relationship with the Ocean, when wilful indifference turned in favour of a relationship of balance and respect.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

In terms of practical outcomes, the conference has provided us with a massive work plan going forward. The "Call for Action" outcome document carefully put together by Member States, under the facilitation of the Permanent Representatives of Portugal and Singapore, explicitly calls for urgent and decisive action. I am pleased to report that last week the General Assembly consensually endorsed the "Call for Action" declaration.

Critically, the conference's seven partnership dialogues produced a comprehensive range of solutions to the identified problems facing the Ocean as presented by global authorities in the relevant fields.

And of course, nearly 1400 Voluntary Commitments were gathered from the private and public sectors from around the world in support of SDG14's 10 targets.

These outcomes have all been captured and are currently being analysed and modelled for implementation in fidelity to the targets of SDG14.

As we turn our attention to the next phase of SDG14 implementation, the immense scale of the challenges we are facing should not be forgotten. To exemplify that scale, think for example of the challenge of Ocean acidification or of rising sea levels.

Our first task must be to implement the work plan that has come out of The Ocean Conference. Through the Register of Voluntary Commitments and findings of the conference's partnership dialogues, we will organise ourselves to do just that.

Secondly, we must not lose that central lesson of The Ocean Conference, namely that we are all in this together. The sense of collective responsibility and of shared ownership of remedial action, must be maintained.

The Ocean is the common heritage of humankind, we all share the responsibility of restoring its health.

The scientific community, the creative community, the private sector, civil society, governments, multilateral agencies and more came together to make The Ocean Conference the success it was.

So the communality of the Ocean action interest groups must be nurtured and embraced as we find innovative ways to implement SDG14's targets.

And we should never overlook the linkages between SDG14 and broader SDG implementation.

The integrated nature of the SDG's is one of the founding principles of the 2030 Agenda. I do not have time to do so in this address, but there are many ways that the outcomes of The Ocean Conference impact positively on SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, and 9, all of which are being reviewed at the HLPF this year.

The last point I would like to emphasise is that the political momentum for Ocean action that emerged from the conference cannot be allowed to dissipate. We have all laboured hard to build the giant wave of commitment on which the conference rode. SDG14 has targets that mature in 2020, 2025 and 2030. We do not have the luxury of time.

It is thus that the offer by both Kenya and Portugal to host a second UN Ocean Conference in 2020 is so fundamental. Three of SDG14's targets mature in 2020, making it the obvious next milestone for accountability, assessment and adjustment.

Notably, COP26 at which progress on Paris Agreement implementation will move front and centre occurs in 2020. This will allow us further opportunity to strengthen the all-important links between Ocean action and Climate action.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Thanks to The Ocean Conference, I firmly believe we have begun to reverse the cycle of decline that accumulated human activity has brought upon the Ocean.

These are early days, but the science conveyed to us during the conference shows we have no time to lose. The work of the HLPF and our deliberations today are thus critical to accelerating our work on SDG14.

As I have said time and again throughout the 71st session, in the implementation of the SDG's we carry a promise to our grandchildren that we will restore our relationship with this planet to one that puts sustainability at its centre. Thereby, we will cease to steal from their future.

SDG14's universality requires us all to work towards the conservation and sustainable utilisation of Ocean's resources. Let us make that so. Let all of us, from whatever walk of life we come, turn our will, our energy and our resources to achieving the noble aims of SDG14.

I thank you for your attention.