

**Keynote Address by H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson,
United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean
2018 HLPF Thematic Review of SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption and Production)
Conference Room 4, UNHQ New York
3-6 p.m., 12 July 2018**

The President of ECOSOC,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All courtesies observed.

Sustainable Development Goal 12 lies at the heart and soul of the 2030 Agenda; capturing the essence of the future we want – a future in which we have ensured sustainable consumption and production patterns for the good of people and planet.

And why do we want such a future? We want it because we feel a deep and abiding love for our children and for those who have yet to be born into the wonders of life on this planet. We have found that our love for them has been affronted. It has finally dawned on us that we have long been stealing from their future with our unsustainable practices of consumption and production,

and we want to set things right before the sands run out on our time of stewardship.

We have a plan to make that so. Implemented with integrity and a greater sense of urgency, our plan will succeed. I refer of course to the Paris Climate Agreement and the 2030 Agenda, setting us on a transformative course towards a low-carbon, sustainable way of life. In the great gatherings of national delegations that hammered out the provisions of the 2030 Agenda in the lead-up to its adoption in September 2015, sustainable consumption and production lay at the centre of all our deliberations. Thus it was that SDG12 came into existence, presenting us with a rational plan to secure the future of our species on Planet Earth, providing a train of cost-efficient and effective ways to achieve economic development, harmonize our relationship with the environment, and advance the well-being of humanity.

It is thus no surprise to see how SDG12 is so intimately linked with all the other SDGs. It is the enabler in the pack. I ask you to think of how sustainable consumption and production patterns

impact positively on poverty alleviation, on hunger, health and education and to think of how they progress our endeavours on water and sanitation, on innovation, sustainable industries, infrastructure and decent work. Just think of how SDG13 on Climate Change, SDG14 on the Ocean, and SDG15 on terrestrial ecosystems will benefit from our adoption of truly sustainable consumption and production patterns that bring us back into relationships of respect and balance with our planetary environment. Dwell on all these linkages and I'm sure you'll agree that SDG12 is indeed at the very heart of our efforts to secure that better future for those coming after us.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is no secret that the jury is out on our progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Some one billion people still have no access to electricity. 2.1 billion have no access to safely managed drinking water services. Some 24% of food is still lost or wasted, while over 800 million still go to bed hungry most days of their life. Lack of equity persists in the yawning gap between rich and poor. In the Ocean, predicted rates are

worsening for sea level rise, acidification, declining fish-stocks, deoxygenation and Ocean warming. While on land, biodiversity, loss of forests, and diminishment of fresh water supplies are all trending badly.

Likewise, our progress on Climate Change is in need of greater input of will and ambition. The current nationally determined contributions under the Paris agreement are not taking warming to the called-for 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial age. They are instead headed for the great uncertainties of at least three degrees by the end of the century.

This state of affairs cannot go on. Three years into the implementation of our plan, we must be honest with ourselves, say not good enough, and call for greater commitment from the global community in implementing the principles of sustainable consumption and production at all levels.

Madam President,

I was listening recently to the CEO of one of the world's largest transnational corporations, who was deeply concerned by global trends on climate, food security, health and biodiversity. What he said was that he is a human being first, before he is a CEO, and that he acts accordingly in his decisions. I believe this is the attitude that all CEOs and corporate board members must take in the challenging era that we have entered. What good are short to medium term profits, if deteriorating world conditions mean their companies' business models will be unsustainable? Surely, sound business sense requires that sustainability be a core reporting and fiduciary responsibility of companies and corporations.

Distinguished delegates,

Renewed trust and partnership are required between the private sector, governments, and we the consumer and citizens. I see this everywhere I go, the need for a rebuilding of that trust.

How, for example, did we sleep-walk into the plastic plague that is polluting our precious environment?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We did it together. But how was it that plastic microbeads made it into our toothpaste and cosmetics and now permeate the very fundamentals of Ocean life? Again, the answer is that we allowed it to happen; and now we are sorry and confused. So, we must work to regain the trust, and for all of us, fidelity to the principles of sustainable consumption and production is the best way I can see of doing that.

We can find our solutions in the unstoppable move away from fossil fuels to renewable energy through solar, wind, thermal, wave power and so much more technological innovation that lies ahead of us. We already find solutions in the transport sector's steady transition to electrically-powered vehicles, and in the IMO's adoption of a strategy to halve GHG emissions from the global shipping fleet by 2050.

We see a better future in the movement away from economic models that value growth for growth's sake, towards models that respect planetary boundaries and support a vision of humanity living in harmony with nature. And with 60% of us urbanized by 2050, we have the concentrated scale necessary to rationalize better public transport, health services, education, infrastructure and employment for our growing population.

There is also great hope to be found in the development of circular economies with emphasis on recycling, reuse and end-of-life management. Meanwhile, the success of environmentally-sound international conventions, such as the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, fortify our resolve to pursue universal multilateral solutions to global problems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have just come from addressing FAO's Committee on Fisheries in Rome, and for all the Ocean's pressing challenges, I come away from that high forum on the future of the world's

fish-stocks, confident that we will be able to provide the world with its protein needs by developing environmentally harmonized aquaculture on sea and land, and by sustainable management of our fisheries sector.

Madam President,

We see a better future in the vibrancy, energy and innovation so obvious in young people today, not wedded to the past, ready to make the necessary changes in consumption and production.

They are patently up to the challenge of embedding global sustainability during their era of stewardship of this the best of planets.

Here at the United Nations we must ensure that the UN system, spread as it is around the world, is working to imbue sustainable consumption and production into all that we do. In our interactions with and support to national governments and civil society, this must be at the heart of our efforts. Whatever agency or programme we are working in, whether in the fields of agriculture, health, industry, finance or development, we must

be in complete accord in respecting the intent of SDG12. No agency stands alone, and neither does the United Nations. We are in partnership with science, business, civil society and governments. We are in partnership with the people of this planet, united in our quest to provide a secure future by embedding the principle of sustainability.

Madam President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for giving me the opportunity of addressing you today. We are at a juncture of human history like no other. A juncture at which over half a century's relative peace and prosperity has enabled humanity's middle class to balloon and flourish. But with that ballooning has come pressure on planetary resources unlike any that humankind has previously witnessed.

As a grandfather, deeply in love with his grandchildren, I'm confident humanity will make the right choices at this historical crossroads. Consumers will change their behaviour, corporations

will adjust to the demands of consumers, governments will listen to their citizens and provide policies requisite for sustainable economies and societies. It will be a very different future in which our grandchildren live, but change has always been a constant, and my prayer is that it will be a better and more equitable future for all.

Gandhiji famously said, “The world has enough for everyone’s needs, but not enough for everyone’s greed.” So, let us heed that sage advice, curb our appetites to what we actually need to enjoy our days, and never diverge from the noble principles of SDG12. Let us consume and produce in respect for sustainability and the good of all.
