

**Blue Africa Summit opening remarks by Ambassador Peter Thomson, UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Tangiers, Morocco, 16 November 2023.**

Minister,  
Permanent Secretary of the Royal Academy,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

All courtesies observed and warm greetings to everyone present with us here at the Blue Africa Summit in the beautiful coastal city of Tangiers. My sincere thanks go to the Royal Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco, the Forum Mondial de la Mer and La Saison Bleue for providing me the honour of speaking to you all today.

Bounded by the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and the Red and Mediterranean Seas, the African continent has much to gain from a careful development of the Sustainable Blue Economy; as indeed it does from the faithful implementation of SDG14, our universal goal of conserving and sustainably using the ocean's resources. At the same time, it should be said that the continent has much to lose from a continuation of the observable decline in the ocean's health.

My daily mantra is no healthy planet without a healthy ocean, and the ocean's health is currently measurably in decline. To halt that decline, the international community has been rallying to ocean's defence through the enactment of SDG14 and the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

At the UN level, it has been rallying by adopting the BBNJ High Seas Treaty in New York this year, and the Global Biodiversity Framework at the CBD COP in Montreal last December. It has been rallying at the WTO in Geneva with work to rid us of harmful fisheries subsidies, and in Nairobi through ongoing negotiations for a treaty to control the rampant plastic pollution of our planet.

These are monumental steps in our struggle to meet the triple planetary crisis of our times, but none will have any effect until they have been robustly concluded, ratified and implemented. Therefore the catch-cry wherever I travel these days is, "Ratify and Implement!" On that score we still have far to go; thus on ocean's behalf, I urge you all to take the message of urgency back to your capitals around the African continent.

I am advised that our aim here at the Blue Africa Summit is to identify the key challenges facing Africa's maritime domain by 2030. We are to focus on how to mobilize political authorities, foster regional cooperation projects, promote sustainable economic models, and encourage ocean protection. I would respectfully suggest that all of these elements are captured in the range of multilateral negotiations and agreements to which I've just referred and will be pleased to discuss them with you in more detail over the course of this summit.

Given constraints of time, I will restrict the remainder of my remarks to one international milestone in particular, namely the Third UN Ocean Conference to be held in Nice in the south of France in less than twenty months' time.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UN Ocean Conferences are mandated by consensus in the UN General Assembly. As such they are universal international moments to take stock of the universally agreed aims of SDG14. Held every three years, I view them as moments of truth along the course of SDG14's implementation; and given their track record to date, I believe it is fair to portray them as vectors of international consensus for improving humanity's relationship with the ocean.

From the very first UN Ocean Conference held in 2017, these conferences have celebrated inclusivity and diversity as their hallmarks. They exist to support the implementation of SDG14, and for SDG14 to succeed, the conferences affirm that cross-sectoral collaboration is vital, through the inclusion of civil society, academia, the private sector and the scientific community. And within those sectors, it goes without saying that gender parity is a given, and that the role of qualified young people is absolutely essential.

In the remainder of my remarks today, please permit me to use the acronym UNOC3 when referring to the third UN Ocean Conference. Co-hosted by the Governments of France and Costa Rica, it will take place in Nice over five days from 9 to 13 June.

During UNOC3, the co-hosts are keen for multilateral ocean-related processes to be brought to fruition, including those acting upon plastic pollution, fisheries, and marine biodiversity conservation in waters within and beyond national jurisdictions.

The co-hosts are giving high attention to three critical areas of ocean action by organising three special events directly prior to UNOC3. The first special event, the One Ocean Science Congress, will be held in Nice from 4 to 7 June and will be dedicated to delivering scientific evidence for better informed science-based decision-making at UNOC3 and thereafter at national, regional and international levels.

The second UNOC3 special event will take place in Nice on 7 June 2025 and will focus on the resilience of coastal cities and regions in the face of sea level rise. This special event is motivated by forecasts that sea level rise will accelerate over coming decades, threatening the ways of life of more than one billion people around the world, and presenting bleak prospects for a broad spectrum of coastal habitations, ecosystems and productive agricultural lands.

Earlier this month in Paris, the Government of France held a One Planet summit on the subject of the poles and glaciers. The summit set out to increase scientific cooperation on the prevention of and adaptation to the melting of the cryosphere, which is a very direct cause of rising sea levels.

An ambitious coalition on Ocean Rise and Resilience was launched at the summit to bring together cities, coastal regions and small island developing states threatened by the risk of submersion. Happily, we will have with us later today, Ambassador Poivre D'Arvor, the Special Envoy of the President of France, who is best equipped to advise us on the outcomes of the Paris summit and its direct relevance to the UNOC3 special event on the resilience of coastal cities and regions in the face of sea level rise.

The third special event, will take place nearby to Nice in the Principality of Monaco, from 7 to 8 June. It will focus on the funding required to protect the ocean and implement SDG14 through the development of a truly sustainable blue economy.

The Monaco Forum will convene high-level representatives of the public sector, the private sector and civil society to increase ocean funding, including through the development of innovative financial solutions and mechanisms, and the creation of an inclusive enabling environment, through policy, regulation and governance.

We are privileged to have with us today, Monsieur Pascal Lamy, the former Director-General of the World Trade Organisation, as he is leading the charge towards the Monaco Forum, and will no doubt elaborate more lucidly to you on what I have just described.

We are faced with maritime challenges that will require Herculean efforts from us all. It is therefore very auspicious that the first edition of the Blue Africa Summit is being held here just a few miles from the famous Grotto of Hercules!

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will conclude my remarks at the Blue Africa Summit with the assertion that the time is upon us to make a massive pivot towards investment in Ocean Science and the Sustainable Blue Economy, all in a nature-friendly world of truly circular economies. We must make that pivot as if our grandchildren's lives depend on it, because for many of them, that may well be the case.

I thank you for your attention.