

High Level Opening Ceremony, UN Ocean Decade Conference, 9.30am, 10 April 2024, CCIB, Barcelona – speech by Ambassador Peter Thomson, UNSG’s Special Envoy for the Ocean

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring you warm greetings from the Secretary-General of the United Nations and convey his best wishes for a successful Ocean Decade Conference. Our thanks go to the generous hosts of the conference, the Kingdom of Spain, the Region of Catalonia and the Barcelona City Council.

At the beginning of the fourth year of the Decade’s implementation, this conference is the first ever-in person gathering of the Ocean Decade community. This is therefore the right moment to congratulate everyone who has played a part in the success of the Decade to date. Tens of thousands of individuals have been involved in Decade Actions, so there are far too many to mention; but you know who you are: the institutions supporting Decade Collaborative Centres; the National Decade Committees and Regional Taskforces; the partners providing funding and resources; the experts involved in the vital Vision 2030 process; and so many more – to all of you, thank you for your commitment to ocean science and the well-being of the ocean.

In the same breath, though they would neither expect nor ask for it, in the presence of you all, I acknowledge with admiration the team of dedicated international public servants at IOC-UNESCO who’ve given so much of themselves to the Decade and the organisation of this global conference. For his vision and tireless commitment to the launching and establishment of the Ocean Decade, I acknowledge with deep respect the contribution of the recently retired IOC Executive Secretary, Vladimir Ryabinin. I also welcome this opportunity to greet the new IOC Executive Secretary, Vidar Helgesen, and assure him of our full support as he takes on the challenges ahead.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Ocean Decade Conference has three aims: firstly, to celebrate and stocktake the Decade’s achievements to date; secondly, to set a common vision for the future of the Decade; and thirdly to spark new partnerships and collaborations to forge ahead with ocean science in the remaining seven years of the Decade.

Let us recognise that these aims will not be met without adequate funding and resources; thus for the good of all, I urge greater attention to Decade funding by all Member States and organisations in a position to contribute. In that regard, I salute those that have developed the Ocean Decade Philanthropic Matchmaking Tool, to be launched, I understand, at the conference on Friday.

Much has happened in the ocean action space since the 2015 advent of the Sustainable Development Goals and SDG14’s drive to conserve and only sustainably use the resources of

the ocean. In 2022, through the Global Biodiversity Framework, multilateral agreement was given to protection of 30% of the planet by 2030. Meanwhile, the UNFCCC's annual Ocean-Climate Dialogue has now embedded ocean issues into the world's climate change deliberations. Through the UN's BBNJ agreement last year, comprehensive international governance will soon be applied to the High Seas. Overseen by UNEP, an internationally-binding Plastics Treaty is now under negotiation to bring plastic pollution of the planet to heel; and WTO is very close to ending harmful fisheries subsidies. All the while, keeping SDG14's progress keenly on track, we have experienced two UN Ocean Conferences, with the third to be co-hosted by Costa Rica and France in Nice, from 9 to 13 June next year.

I emphasise that all of these global gatherings are grounded in ocean science, hence the great importance of the Ocean Decade's work. We all know that the state of our knowledge of the ocean's properties remains insufficient for us to make the big decisions on the existential challenges confronting us. Thus, it is time to double down on the work of the Ocean Decade, for we urgently need the results of science to create and achieve our policy aspirations.

I look forward to carrying forward the outcomes of this conference, and to promoting them faithfully throughout the busy schedule of ocean-related international meetings rolling out between now and next year's UN Ocean Conference.
