

**Speech at Opening Session of Our Ocean Conference, Athens, 9am 16 April by Ambassador Peter Thomson UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean**

Heads of State and Government  
Ministers  
Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen

All protocols observed. Our thanks go to the hosts of the conference, the Government of the Hellenic Republic, for its generous hospitality and the warm welcome given to us. To all participants in the conference, I bring warm greetings from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, and convey his best wishes for a successful Our Ocean Conference here in Athens, this great city renowned throughout the millennia for the inspiration it has gifted the world.

Speaking of inspiration, this is the ninth edition of the Our Ocean Conference, and it provides us a special opportunity to acknowledge the debt owed by the global ocean community to Senator John Kerry. Through his steadfast dedication to the ocean's well-being, the legacy of which is imbued in the Our Ocean Conferences, we see that the course he set us has been, and continues to be, a true one. Thank you, Senator Kerry.

Our thanks also to the Government of Greece for pointing us in the right direction with their chosen theme for this conference – "An Ocean of Potential." The universally agreed targets of SDG14 set us to conserving and only sustainably using the ocean's resources, and slowly but surely the potential of the Sustainable Blue Economy is working its way into its rightful place at the forefront of global thinking.

Step by step, stroke by stroke, around the world the Sustainable Blue Economy is being embraced as the way forward to a resilient future for humanity. Be it through blue foods, renewable energy, or new medicines, on a planet on which over 90% of the space for life lies in the ocean, this is logically as it should be.

And so, the conservation of the ocean becomes a matter of vital self-interest for humanity. You've heard the mantra, there can be no healthy planet without a healthy ocean, and the ocean's health is currently measurably in decline. Be it in relation to climate change, fisheries, or marine protected areas, we have much work to do to halt and reverse that decline.

In response to the fundamental changes underway in the planet's climate and ocean conditions, it's heartening that when it comes to multilateral environmental agreements, we can observe a tide of consensual good intent moving about the planet. From our determination to protect 30% of the planet by 2030, to our agreement to henceforth effectively govern the High Seas, we are now alive to our responsibilities and the need for urgent action.

We aspire to conclude a truly robust Plastics Treaty, one that will bring an end to plastic's pollution of the ocean. And we continue to strive towards ending the harmful subsidies given to the fisheries sector, as if the health of the ocean depends upon our doing so, because in fact it does. So, let us take the tide while it serves.

At the same time, thanks to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, ocean science is receiving more attention now than ever before in the history of our planet. Those of you who were present with us in Barcelona at last week's hugely productive Ocean Decade Conference can attest to that. To get to the secure future we seek for the generations to come, we must be fortified by the very best of climate science and ocean science.

To conclude, in the name of intergenerational justice, we will seize upon the ocean's potential to carry us to the safe harbours we seek. And throughout the busy schedule of ocean-related international meetings rolling out between now and the UN Ocean Conference in Nice in June next year, we commit to faithfully carry forward the outcomes of this inspirational Athens conference.

Thank you for your attention.

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