

Indonesia International Sustainability Forum - Speech by Ambassador Peter Thomson, UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Jakarta Indonesia, 6 September 2024.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Selamat Siang. All courtesies observed and many thanks to the Forum's organisers for affording me the privilege of addressing you all today. The subject of my remarks, "Capitalizing on the Sustainable Blue Economy," is one that is very dear to me, and I'll explain why.

Since my appointment in 2017 as the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, it's been my responsibility to lead global efforts to implement SDG14, our universally agreed sustainable development goal of conserving and only sustainably using the ocean's resources. While the Sustainable Blue Economy is not specifically mentioned in SDG14, it lies at the very heart of this global goal.

Back in 2015, we struggled to have an ocean goal included in the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda, but that is not so today with widespread global awareness of the ocean's fundamental importance for the future security of human food supplies, climate resilience, and the transition to blue-green energy.

Nevertheless, we continue to be caught up in the age-old human struggle between protection and exploitation - the old arm-wrestle between using and conserving. As we go about our consumption of the ocean's resources, a voice keeps reminding us, "Don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg."

Excellencies,

The rate of global overfishing continues to climb – FAO's last estimate was that 34% of globally assessed stocks are being fished beyond their biologically sustainable limits. UNEP and IOC-UNESCO report that we are continuing to pollute the ocean with excessive noise, poisonous chemicals and the all-pervasive plague of plastic.

Meanwhile, the kick-on effects of anthropogenic greenhouse gases and resulting global warming are being felt throughout the ocean, from pole to pole, from surface waters to the deepest trenches. Marine species are on the move as ocean conditions alter around them, and even the global system of ocean currents is undergoing disturbing change.

Ocean warming leads inexorably to rising sea levels with existential consequences for low-lying islands and coastal areas. Increasing ocean temperatures and acidity are causing the ongoing mortality of corals around the world, with huge implications for the state of marine biodiversity. All in all, this state of affairs is summarised in my daily mantra of, “There can be no healthy planet without a healthy ocean, and the ocean’s health is currently measurably in decline.”

And so, Ladies and Gentlemen, where does all this leave us when we consider Capitalizing on the Sustainable Blue Economy? In the first place, it means we must stay true to the course we set ourselves with SDG14. We’ll have the opportunity to assess our performance in that regard when we gather at the third UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France, 9 to 13 June next year.

Secondly, we must ever strive to achieve the balance between protection and exploitation that SDG14 represents. We should be rejecting a blue economy that stands for one more round of linear exploitation of finite planetary resources. Recognising the current decline in the ocean’s health, and that over the next 25 years the planet’s human population will soar to close to 10 billion, we should only ever be contemplating a *sustainable* blue economy. Adding that sustainable descriptor means we keep our fisheries activities within biologically sustainable levels. It implies adherence to circular economies in as far as they relate to the ocean, be that by way of product design, consumption patterns, or reuse of materials.

The Sustainable Blue Economy involves the greening of shipping and local water transportation. It has offshore energy as a central pillar, including wind, wave, tidal, and the kinetic energy of an ever-moving ocean. It points to new sources of medicine in the post-antibiotic age, to pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals and cosmetics.

In short, approached in this manner, the Sustainable Blue Economy will lead us to the job creation, to the socio-economic resilience, and to the balance with Mother Nature that we seek for humanity on Planet Earth. Properly

implemented, the Sustainable Blue Economy will keep us true to the obligation of Intergenerational Justice.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Addressing you in the home city of the Archipelagic and Island States Forum, I take this opportunity to applaud the AIS for its good works in relation to the Sustainable Blue Economy. When considering the Sustainable Blue Economy, AIS has identified three gap categories present in many archipelagic and island states. Firstly, the gap attributed to access to tenure, environmental rights, and access to the utilization of marine resources. Secondly, the gap in the distribution of benefits, especially to marginalized groups, including women and indigenous people. And thirdly, the gap in access to genuine community participation and the lack of community involvement throughout the strategic decision-making process and governance. These three gaps are eminently fillable within the lifetime of SDG14, and I urge all present to be part of that drive.

Being in Jakarta, I should also mention that at the ASEAN level, the Blue Economy Framework was adopted in 2023. The Framework serves the region as a comprehensive guide to harnessing and managing marine ecosystems sustainably for the benefit of ASEAN's people. Let us recognise that no single country can achieve this on their own and that strong partnerships will always be required for the benefit of all.

To conclude my remarks, I recall that when Indonesia was President of G20, back in 2022, I was privileged to be part of the launching ceremony in Bali of O20, the "Ocean 20" action platform of G20 that is committed to the Sustainable Blue Economy. I'm greatly heartened to see that O20 was carried forward by India during its G20 Presidency and that it's now flourishing under the Brazilian Presidency.

And so, for all that Indonesia has done and is continuing to do for the development of the Sustainable Blue Economy, on behalf of the ocean and all those working to safeguard its well-being, I express deepest gratitude.

Terima kasih!