

International Conference on Sustainable Coral Reefs, Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia, 13 December 2024 - video message from Ambassador Peter Thomson, UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean.

Your Excellency Sakti Trenggono, Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries,
Your Excellency Professor Rahmat Pambudy, Minister of National Development Planning,
Professor Indroyono Susilo, Chairman of The International Conference for Sustainable Coral Reefs,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Selamat Siang, good afternoon,

All courtesies observed and thank you for the privilege of addressing you all at this important gathering. I present my congratulations to the Government of Indonesia and the Coral Reef Triangle Initiative for the timely nature of this conference, and I'll say a bit more about that timeliness in a moment. But firstly, let me say that my use of the word "important" to describe this meeting is clearly a massive understatement, because the very future of coral reefs is under great threat. In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – a collection of leading scientific and policy experts from around the world – predicted that at global average surface warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial temperatures, the world would lose around 75% of its coral reefs. They said that at 2 degrees warming, that figure would rise to 99%.

I'm sure you're all well aware that this year has witnessed the largest global mass coral bleaching event observed in human history; and that unwelcome distinction of course closely correlates with WMO's announcement last month that 2024 is on track to be the hottest year ever recorded, with many trusted sources predicting that this year will prove to be the year we went over the 1.5 degrees threshold.

You may have heard my daily mantra, "There can be no healthy planet without a healthy ocean, and the health of the ocean is currently measurably in decline." Since anyone in their right mind would rather live on a healthy planet than a sick one, the urgent question is what are we going to do about it? How are we going to stop and reverse the decline?" This is particularly pertinent when it comes to the fate of coral. Since around a quarter of all marine life relies on coral for support, it is very difficult to imagine a healthy ocean devoid of coral reefs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In response to these alarming trends, the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network has been playing a critical role in documenting the health of coral reefs worldwide. Through its extensive network of scientists and practitioners, the Network is providing the most comprehensive and consistent data on coral reef conditions, which are essential for informing science-based policy decisions and restoration efforts.

I am also pleased to share with you that the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network will be releasing its 2025 Status of Coral Reefs of the World Report, a key document that will summarise the latest trends, threats, and conservation progress related to coral reefs globally. This report will be an invaluable resource for nations, organisations, and individuals working to turn the tide for coral reef ecosystems. Its findings will reinforce the urgency of collective action and guide us as we prepare for the many significant global conferences of 2025.

I mentioned the timeliness of this conference and did so chiefly in the context of the global emergency that I've just described. But it is also timely in the manner in which it fits conveniently into the international calendar of major international conferences relevant to the protection of coral reefs. We have recently completed the CBD COP16 in Cali, at which the survival of coral received a level of attention unprecedented at previous CBD COPs. This was thanks largely to the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and the For Coral Pavilion that the ICRI team managed on behalf of the global coral community, at which many scores of coral events were held to foster innovative thinking, collective responsibility, and determined dedication to coral's survival.

On October 30th in Cali, I spoke at the Emergency Special Session on Coral Reefs that was one of the headline events at COP16. Fulfilment of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, under which the world has agreed to restore and protect 30% of the planet by 2030, infused these proceedings; and we can say that as a result, the aspiration to protect 100% of coral reefs by 2030 is now firmly in play.

Let us take heart from the fact that the international conferences of 2025 present broad arenas of opportunity to fight for coral's survival. The 3rd UN Ocean Conference will be held in Nice from 9 to 13 June, and it will see coral take centre stage at the Ocean Action Panel dedicated to conserving, sustainably

managing and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems; as well as at several of the other Ocean Action Panels and a range of Blue Zone coral side-events. The Global Fund for Coral Reefs will hold a major pledging event at UNOC3, and UNFCCC's Coral Reef Breakthrough will progress its aim of securing the \$12 billion in investments from public and private sources it seeks by 2030 to conserve and restore at least 50% of the planet's coral reef ecosystems.

In mid-October, IUCN's World Conservation Congress will be held in Abu Dhabi. This global event takes place once every four years, and as it deals with the world's most pressing environmental challenges, be assured that the plight of coral reefs will be receiving high attention. In that regard, ICRI is working closely with the coral reef community to advance a motion at the Congress that addresses coral bleaching, and we urge all IUCN members to support this motion.

We will then have a fighting chance of overcoming the climate change setbacks that we suffered this year, when we gather at UNFCCC's COP30 in Belém, Brazil in November. Since anthropogenically-created global warming is the chief cause of coral's troubles, the defenders of coral will be approaching Belém with mixed moods of hope, frustration and a determination to see a turn-around in the hitherto one-way path of global warming.

As you confer with each other in Manado, on Indonesia's beautiful Sulawesi Island, I urge you to think of the International Conference on Sustainable Coral Reefs as a formative step along the path of progress that these multilateral conferences strive to create and commit to. Convening in the heart of the Coral Triangle, a region renowned for its unparalleled marine biodiversity, you are presented with a special opportunity to devise and agree on strategies that will shape the future of coral reefs and the countless communities depending on them.

As we delve into the scientific, technical, and policy aspects of coral reef conservation, we must not lose sight of the human dimensions involved. Coastal communities around the world rely on coral reefs for their livelihoods, blue food security, and cultural heritage, and must be included in our deliberations. Let us not lose sight of the fact that by empowering local communities and promoting sustainable livelihoods, we can ensure that the benefits of coral reef conservation are shared equitably.

Here we can be confident that the sustainable blue economy, one that is nature positive and regenerative, a development approach that harnesses the power of the ocean while protecting its resources, will be the best friend of coastal

communities and the coral reefs they live alongside. By investing in ocean-based industries such as sustainable fisheries, nature-positive aquaculture, the greening of coastal shipping and marine tourism, we can create jobs, reduce poverty, and safeguard marine ecosystems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To all members of the world's coral reef community, the message is clear: as sure as sea levels are rising, the alarm lights are flashing for coral, and we are the ones who must create the action that is required to save coral. Again, I commend to you all the upcoming 2025 Status of Coral Reefs of the World Report as it will provide the critical data and evidence we need to inform our strategies, foster accountability, and inspire innovation in coral reef conservation.

We must fight on coral's behalf to ensure that coral reef management frameworks around the world are strengthened in the cause of restoration and protection. We must demand effective management of pollution and more robust monitoring. We are required to elevate capacity-building and knowledge-sharing in coral's defence, and cannot rest until exponential scaling up of financial support, from both public and private sectors, is secured for a global environment in which coral can continue to exist.

I wish you well in your deliberations in Manado at this important and timely conference.

Terima kasih and thank you for your attention.
