

Speech by Ambassador Peter Thomson, UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean, at the Opening Session of the Our Ocean Conference, 9.15am 29 April, Busan, Korea

Minister Kang Do-Hyung,
Mayor Park Heong-joon,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

All courtesies observed and warm greetings to all present.

On behalf of all those who've come from afar to participate in this conference, I give thanks, Mr Mayor, for the warmth of hospitality with which we've been received in the beautiful coastal city of Busan.

To Minister Kang and all those he leads at the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, and indeed to the Government of the Republic of Korea as a whole, we give thanks and congratulations for your hosting of the 10th Our Ocean Conference and pledge our commitment to its success. I choose this moment to also thank and congratulate Korea for its recent ratification of the BBNJ High Seas Treaty.

I note that the purpose of the Busan conference has been stated to be the mobilization of global action to address the challenges facing the ocean. In pursuit of that purpose, six key areas of action have been identified, all of which are in urgent need of international and local attention.

One such is that of marine protected areas. Ladies and Gentlemen, if we are to prevent a massive loss of biodiversity in the ocean, marine protection must enter a new era in which 30% of the ocean is protected. In pursuance of that responsibility, I'm pleased to recognise the work underway to present a 30x30 Ocean Action Plan at the UN Ocean Conference on June 9th.

Meanwhile sustainable fisheries demand enforcement of science-based and rigorously enforced management of fish-stocks if we're to end the current malady of overfishing global stocks by a factor of 36%. That strident demand also extends to the cessation of harmful fisheries subsidies, through the two WTO processes that are still underway in Geneva.

The curtailing of marine pollution will take a huge step forward if we're successful this year in agreeing on a really robust, internationally-binding Plastic Treaty. For the sake of human and environmental health, it is important to understand that agreement on the proposed Plastic Treaty is our once in a lifetime opportunity to control plastic production and pollution.

With ocean temperatures steadily exceeding our earlier forecasts of warming, we're witnessing the scientifically predicted consequences. The world is experiencing its worst coral bleaching and mortality event on record, and sea levels are rising at an increasing rate. Singling out the countries at high risk from sea level rise, the UN has calculated that 900 million people living in low-lying coastal areas are going to be placed in acute danger.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we want our children to inherit a relatively stable planet, then we must do everything in our power to keep fossil fuels in the ground. We must continue humanity's rational movement away from the burning of fossil fuels towards a net zero world, an equitably electrified world, powered by renewable energy.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations said last week that since the adoption of the Paris Climate Agreement, the projected curve of global warming has been bent down from over 4 degrees Celsius of temperature rise within this century, to 2.6 degrees if current national climate action plans are fully implemented. To quote him further, "Renewables are the economic opportunity of the century. Dissenters and fossil fuel interests may try to stand in the way, but the world is moving forward, full speed ahead. No group or government can stop the clean energy revolution. We cannot, must not and will not let upon climate action."

Before closing my remarks, I acknowledge the presence of Secretary John Kerry, the man behind the Our Ocean Conferences and the great contribution they have made to the well-being of the ocean. On behalf of an ever-grateful ocean community, I thank you Secretary Kerry.

After Busan we will be turning our attention to Nice, where in a month's time the events surrounding the 3rd UN Ocean Conference will commence. In their wisdom, the conference co-hosts, Costa Rica and France, have arranged for three special events focussed on financing the Sustainable Blue Economy, advancing Ocean Science, and addressing the consequences of rising sea levels. Within the context of the conference itself, Member States of the United Nations have designated the topics for ten Ocean Action Panels, and I am pleased to see that Korea has been chosen to co-chair the panel promoting the role of sustainable food from the ocean for poverty eradication and food security.

Looking ahead to the continuity of global attention to the support of SDG14, our universal agreement to conserve and sustainably use the resources of the ocean, I warmly welcome the offer of Korea and Chile to co-host the 4th UN Ocean Conference, with a view to holding it in Korea in 2028.

Let us all dedicate ourselves to the true course set by international agreement. Let us be strong in thought and deed that reason and innovation will overcome the mounting challenges ahead. Let us take the tide while it serves, and through faithful implementation of SDG14, may we thereby bequeath a healthy ocean to our children and grandchildren.

Thank you.
