

Keynote address
**Expert Group meeting « Oceans, Seas and Sustainable development:
implementation and follow-up to Rio +20 »**

18 April 2013

At the outset, I would like to extend my special thanks to Mr. Nikhil SETH, Director of the Division for Sustainable Development of DESA for his leadership in setting up a robust framework for our post-Rio discussions.

May I also recognize all the participants' expertise which represents the sharpest and most relevant authority in the oceans community.

I don't have to convince you of the importance of oceans and their implications on our survival and their ramifications on the economic, social and environmental spheres. But Rio has definitely renewed the political commitment to include oceans in the post-2015 development agenda.

The Future we want, outcome document of the Rio Conference, has granted oceans a key role in the definition of our common future.

Today's meeting is timely and relevant as Member States have embarked upon implementing the Rio outcome. I have no doubt that your deliberations will enhance our intergovernmental discussions and deliberations.

I would like to reiterate that the foundation of any oceans and law of the sea related issue lies within the United Nations General Assembly. Indeed, we simply cannot avoid reaching a consensus on the yearly omnibus GA resolution to advance the ocean agenda. This political reality would also apply should the Member States decide to draft an implementing agreement to UNCLOS on new issues.

A telling example: the Rio outcome document had to abide by the timeline and the previous commitments made by the Member States themselves through the GA processes. An ambitious document is one that can be implemented.

Nevertheless, the UN system is capable to allow us, Member States, to fill in the gaps and implement our decisions. I want to acknowledge the coordination task of UN-Oceans as well as the initiative of the Secretary-General, the Oceans Compact that aims at enhancing the system wide coherence in the delivery of ocean-related mandates and encourage synergies within the UN System.

I also want to acknowledge the World Bank's Global Partnership for Oceans which focuses on concrete actions for improved oceans management.

Against that background, I would like to share with you some preliminary thoughts on how oceans could be duly taken into account in the post-2015 agenda.

1. The **increase in global population** and the fact that most people live in urban areas that happen to be in the coastal areas exerts incremental pressure on oceans.
2. The consequences of **climate change and ocean acidification** further exacerbate the fragile balance of oceans eco-system and biodiversity.

Those facts have direct and dire effects on the capacity of oceans and seas to fulfill their role for the future of the planet and the world population.

Whether we decide to devote a SDG to oceans or we address all their related issues through cross-cutting themes, we cannot avoid determining clear and achievable targets that take into account the **linkages with its social, economic and environmental implications**. Our deliberations on oceans cannot happen in a vacuum or amongst oceans experts alone.

Indeed, targets and indicators set for productive and healthy oceans will have to encompass issues pertaining to food security and safety, fisheries, transports, marine and land-based pollutions, biodiversity, natural risks reductions and tourism. Targets will also have to account for the foreseeable exploitation of marine minerals in the international seabed Area as well as marine genetic resources.

Furthermore, those targets shall be established at the **international and national levels** and regional and local initiatives should also be encouraged. This top-down/bottom-up approach should allow all stakeholders to take an active share in the decision-making.

Such an exercise requires **the participation of all levels of society**. The conversation initiated for the post-2015 UN development agenda must be encouraged since sustainable development is the only viable option. Reliable scientific data should be the basis for the formulation of our policies.

Countries shall have the means to tailor their objectives based on their specific needs. In this regard, it is essential that developing countries be given the tools to enhance their capacity building and benefit from technology transfers. Beyond the ODA and regular means of financing for development, pledges should also come from the private sector. In this new sustainable development paradigm, **partnerships** will be crucial.

A **SDG on ocean** should therefore be elaborated from the scientific input you are about to underline and the omnibus resolution could already lay the ground for our undertaking as early as the 68th session. It will be up to Member States to strike a balance between an ambitious set of targets to be implemented and one that can be achieved.

The adoption of SDGs in 2015 would coincide with the decision expected from the General Assembly on a possible implementation agreement to UNCLOS on areas beyond national jurisdiction.

To conclude, we need to adopt a **new integrated approach towards the use and preservation of our oceans**. This approach will also need to look at the **linkages with other pressing issues such as climate change**.

It is a fact that some Member States are already facing security threats because of sea-level rise. In this regard, the 2014 Third International Conference on SIDS will be an opportunity to come up with concrete solutions to address their vulnerabilities into the post-2015 agenda.

Finally, it is our duty to showcase that by giving oceans the political consideration they deserve we fulfill our main priority to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development for all. Let us not forget that there is no viable alternative.