

13 December 2016

71st session of the General Assembly

**Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Briefing on the Ocean Conference**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for attending today's briefing on preparations for the Ocean Conference. The Conference will be held at UN Headquarters from 5 to 9 June 2017.

I thank the representatives of the Co-presidents of the Ocean Conference, Sweden, and Fiji; the Secretary-General of the Conference, Under-Secretary-General Wu; and Special Adviser to the Co-Presidents, Under-Secretary-General Soares of the Office of Legal Affairs for joining today's briefing.

Excellencies,

I was recently in Morocco to attend the COP22 meeting and travelled to a number of European capitals to hold other talks.

During my discussions with high-level representatives – from across Government, UN agencies, civil society, the scientific community, and the private sector – all were keen to hear about the Ocean Conference.

I was buoyed by the high levels of enthusiasm that so many of them expressed for the Ocean Conference, and the positive actions it will generate to save our ocean.

Excellencies,

The importance of next year's Ocean Conference cannot be overstated.

The Ocean is the lifeblood of our planet. It covers three quarters of the Earth's surface, contains 97 percent of the Earth's water, and provides more than 50% of the oxygen we breathe.

It drives global weather patterns, absorbs around 30 percent of human-produced carbon dioxide, and serves as a critical buffer to the ever-worsening impacts of global warming.

It is home to nearly 200,000 identified species, although the actual numbers are estimated to lie in the millions.

Economists estimate the value of the ecosystem services provided by the Ocean to be around \$24 trillion per year.

Put simply, we are all united by the ocean. And without a healthy and sustainable ocean, our place on this planet will be in jeopardy.

Unfortunately, that is the trajectory that we are currently on.

Science has confirmed our beloved ocean is ailing, and that urgent remedial action is required.

The need for collective action to reverse the cycle of decline in which our ocean is currently caught was recognized by world leaders last year when they adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Within the 2030 Agenda is Sustainable Development Goal 14 which critically sets out specific targets that must be met in order to conserve and sustainably use our oceans.

The Ocean Conference, to be held on 5 – 9 June 2017, is our unique opportunity to mobilize the urgent collective action that is needed.

The Conference will bring together all relevant stakeholders – Governments, UN System, civil society, scientific, academic, and technical experts, the private sector, and local communities –to ensure a united and cooperative approach to give humanity as a whole the best opportunity available to take action.

This Conference will also build on existing efforts and respect ongoing processes that can support implementation of SDG14 by all stakeholders.

The outcomes of the Conference will include a ‘Call for Action’ declaration that will provide the political commitment needed to drive action to effectively implement SDG14.

The Secretary-General will shortly issue a Background Note to inform the elements for the ‘Call for Action’ declaration.

A preparatory meeting for the Ocean Conference will be held in New York on 15 and 16 February, at which the elements of the Call for Action declaration will be discussed, and the themes for the Conference’s partnership dialogues will be considered.

I have appointed two co-facilitators to chair the preparatory meeting – the Permanent Representatives of Portugal and Singapore – who I thank for taking on this important role.

They have said that they are available to meet with any delegations who wish to discuss the preparatory meeting and Call for Action. I call on all Member States to extend their full support to the co-facilitators.

The other key outcome of the Conference will be the forging of strategic partnerships between Member States, the UN, the scientific community, civil society, international financial institutions, philanthropies, and other key stakeholders, to help achieve long-term solutions for Ocean's problems.

The partnerships will be given the opportunity to announce pledges of action programmes during the seven partnership dialogues that will be held at the Conference. These voluntary commitments will amount to our moments of accountability, wherein we undertake meaningful initiatives to reverse the decline of the Ocean's health.

I encourage all governments and stakeholders to consider launching concrete and innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships centered on voluntary commitments for positive action, thereby taking forward the achievement of the SDG14 targets.

Participation at the Conference at the highest possible levels is encouraged, and in this regard, the UN Secretary-General will shortly be issuing invitations to Heads of State and Government.

I also encourage all relevant stakeholders to be involved, including key related sectors and industries, such as climate change, tourism, trade, transport, and food security. The full involvement of civil society and the private sector will be critical to positive outcomes.

Excellencies,

The success of the Ocean Conference will be vital to us all – for the health and sustainability of the Ocean, our place on this planet, and ultimately, for the peace and prosperity of us all.

I call upon your full support and enthusiasm. I call upon your full and positive participation in the preparatory meeting in February and of course in the Ocean Conference itself.

Thank you.