

28 February 2017

71st session of the General Assembly

Briefing by H.E. Peter Thomson to G77 and China

Ambassador Horacio Sevilla Borja, Chair of the Group of 77 and China,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by thanking the Group of 77 and China for inviting me to this meeting. It is a great pleasure to be present amongst you again, in this group that has in the past, and continues to be, at the very center of my work.

Today's discussion follows on from our meeting five months ago, where I outlined my vision for the 71st Session of the General Assembly. Time flies, dear colleagues, please remember that. You will recall from our last meeting that the priority for the 71st session is to achieve meaningful progress in implementing each of the 2030 Agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

How are we doing on that? Well, today I would like to give you a sense of what has been achieved to date, and what our plans are for the rest of the Session. I will also take advantage of our gathering to address a couple of other key issues for the Group – namely migration, and taxation and illicit flows.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates

Many of you here attended the briefing I gave to the General Assembly last week on the outcomes of my recent trips, and the work my office is undertaking to convene a series of High-Level SDG Action Events. I set out the latter in my letter to you all dated 8 February.

I will not repeat myself today, but I encourage everyone who was not in attendance last week to find my full statement from that briefing on the OPGA website.

Be assured that the work we have been undertaking in close collaboration with key stakeholders from across Government, the UN system, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and the scientific and academic communities, is generating strong interest and outcomes for driving SDG implementation.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Earlier today, I attended the swearing-in ceremony for Deputy-Secretary-General Amina Mohammed. DSG Mohammed has, as you know, been tasked with driving SDG implementation by the UN system,

and I have already extended to her the full support and cooperation of my Office in advancing this critical endeavor.

The close collaboration between my Office and the UN system builds on our engagement with Secretary-General Guterres over the last few months, to assist his smooth transition into Office, to facilitate his discussions with Member States, and to support his work to reform the UN system and ensure that it is able to deliver efficiently and effectively on the SDGs.

In this regard, I have advised Secretary-General Guterres of my Office's willingness to work closely with him to ensure that this reform effort is inclusive and undertaken in close collaboration with the UN membership. The same close collaboration will be extended to DSG Amina Mohammed.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

The United Nations Ocean Conference, to be convened from 5 to 9 June this year, is set to be the historic milestone in building global momentum for the implementation of SDG 14. The Ocean Conference represents our best opportunity to reverse the cycle of decline into which human activity has pushed the Ocean.

The Conference will catalyze political support through a strong 'Call for Action'; and it will secure the game-changing voluntary commitments and strategic partnerships necessary for the achievement of SDG14's noble targets. In this regard, I underline the importance of the online registry for voluntary commitments that has been launched and which can be found on the Conference's website. I urge you all to register your commitments in support of SDG14 without delay.

Earlier this month at the Preparatory Meeting for the Ocean Conference we witnessed the high-level of commitment towards meaningful participation in the Conference from a very broad range of stakeholders. I also saw high levels of commitment last week in Bali at The Economist's World Oceans Summit, where I urged participants to join us in meeting the targets of SDG14.

Building on the discussions at the Preparatory Meeting, last Friday, a letter was sent to all Missions advising the themes for the 7 Partnership Dialogues to be held during the Conference. A zero draft of the 'Call for Action' will soon be circulated to Missions by the Co-facilitators.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

The High-Level SDG Action Events that will be convened by my Office will address a number of issues of importance to the Group of 77. I would like to use this opportunity to briefly touch upon these.

Firstly, all of the events have been selected to address means of implementation for the SDGs, or to drive cross-cutting action for SDG implementation.

Secondly, they all aim to help increase global awareness of critical implementation challenges, to identify concrete solutions, and to bring together all key stakeholders – across Government, the international community, civil society, the private sector, and academia.

And thirdly, the success of each of these events relies on the engagement of all partners. In this regard I call on the G77 to participate actively, and at the highest possible levels, to ensure their success.

In terms of the specific events, as you know, on 24 January I convened a High-Level Dialogue on ‘Building Sustainable Peace for All’ which aimed to increase understanding of the synergies between conflict prevention, sustaining peace, and sustainable development.

On 23 March, I will convene a High-Level Meeting on ‘Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Agenda’ aimed at highlighting the interlinkages between climate action and sustainable development.

On 18 April, I will convene an SDG Financing Lab to promote global discussions on sustainable financing. The event will include workshops showcasing strategies for leveraging private and public financing for the SDGs and demonstrate how capacity-building can help these efforts.

On 17 May, I will convene a ‘High-Level Event on Innovation and Connectivity’ to discuss ways to harness the power of technology to solve critical challenges in support of SDG implementation.

And then, on 28 June – rather than the previously advised 22 June – I will convene a High-Level Event on Education to raise the importance of inclusive and equitable quality education as a pre-requisite and driver of opportunity for all.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

In addition to these initiatives, I have also been working to support the mandated events and processes for the Session.

Indeed, this Friday, 3 March, I will hold a High-Level thematic discussion for World Wildlife Day, and on 22 March, I will convene a working-level dialogue on the UN’s work on water-related goals and targets. In June we will have The Ocean Conference, and in August, I will convene a High-Level Meeting on UN Habitat.

There are also a number of ongoing intergovernmental processes which my Office and I are closely engaged on.

The first is the ongoing General Assembly Alignment process, which is being co-facilitated by the Permanent Representatives of Argentina and Australia. This process provides an important opportunity to ensure that the GA, ECOSOC, and their subsidiary bodies are positioned to enhance synergies and coherence of the GA in light of the 2030 Agenda.

To date, the co-facilitators have engaged with Member States and other stakeholders to build a common understanding and timeline on the way forward. Your ongoing involvement will be instrumental in moving this process forward.

There is also, of course, the ongoing process on migration, which is a high priority for my Office, as well as for this Group.

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that international migration is a multidimensional reality with major impacts on the development prospects for countries of origin, transit, and destination, and it is an issue which requires coherent and comprehensive responses.

The General Assembly will soon begin preparations for a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, following the recent finalization of consultations on the modalities resolution. The modalities resolution is set to be adopted by the General Assembly at the conclusion of the Fifth Committee's budget processes. Given the time-sensitivity of this process, I urge you to support the swift consideration of the budgetary implications of the modalities resolution in the Fifth Committee, so that the process can move forward, consistent with the timeline envisaged in the agreed modalities.

For my part, following formal adoption of the modalities resolution, my Office will be organizing a series of informal thematic sessions and multi-stakeholder hearings, as mandated in the modalities resolution.

I encourage all of your delegations to participate actively in these meetings in New York, Geneva and Vienna, as well as in Regional Economic Commissions' meetings at which the regional and sub-regional aspects of migration will be considered.

All of these discussions, as well as the outcomes of other relevant mechanisms such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development, will feed into the preparatory process for the Global Compact.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Before concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to commend Ecuador on the priority theme for its presidency of the G77 – strengthening international cooperation in tax matters.

Implementing the 2030 Agenda will require mobilizing all forms of finance, including by increasing private investment, and enhancing the capacity of countries to mobilize domestic resources through taxation.

In our changing development cooperation landscape, characterized in particular by the declining levels of international development assistance, international cooperation to build human and institutional capacity, strengthen governance, and combat tax evasion and illicit financial flows, takes on even greater importance.

In line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, I therefore support efforts aimed at increasing international cooperation on tax matters. In this regard, the ECOSOC Special Meeting on International Cooperation in Tax Matters, to be held in April, provides an important opportunity to take forward these discussions. They might also be included in the discussions at the SDG Financing Lab, which I am organizing in April.

Excellencies,

As a former Chair of the G77, I am keenly aware of the importance of progress on a number of key issues and processes during the 71st Session, to advancing the interests of the Group. Indeed, as we enter the second year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it is essential that we continue to work closely together to build momentum, collaboration, and partnership between all stakeholders, and to keep the wheels of implementation turning.

I look forward to continuing to work closely with you in these efforts.

I thank you.