

**Ambassador Peter Thomson Video Message for  
Keeping the Momentum for Ocean Action  
Webinars – Asia Pacific (UNDESA/ESCAP), 3 June  
2020**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

All courtesies observed and greetings to you all as we gather here in cyberspace. I hope that whatever your circumstance, that you and your families are safe and well. And I trust that everyone is finding it in their hearts to exercise the best of human traits: of sharing, of empathy and of kindness to our fellows and those who are suffering the most in our communities as a consequence of this pandemic.

I thank my colleagues in ESCAP and UNDESA for organizing this webinar, with a view to our getting together to maintain the momentum of the Ocean Action movement that is supporting the implementation of SDG14, the Ocean goal that sets

out to conserve and sustainably use the Ocean's resources.

It is true that the Super Year for the Ocean has been disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic. All the great environmental conferences planned for 2020 - for biodiversity, the climate crisis, and for the Ocean - have been postponed. But no more than that. The conferences will be held, as soon as conditions allow, and we will gather at them in real and virtual format to deliberate, for we remain resolutely committed to the multilateral process aimed at securing a sustainable way of life on this planet. In the meantime, we have a responsibility to maintain the momentum and where required, endeavour to meet the targets set by international agreement.

Preparations for the UN Ocean Conference continue on a step-by-step basis, with dates to be announced in due course on when the conference will be held. The location of the conference is still going to be in

the beautiful harbor city of Lisbon, Portugal; and the co-hosts, Portugal and Kenya, are resolute in their determination to host a vibrant conference that will break new ground for the innovation and science required to successfully implement SDG14.

So here we are, Ladies and Gentlemen, gathered in virtual proximity to discuss how we can best maintain the momentum for Ocean Action.

Welcome everyone to this webinar and I trust you will find it to be a useful part of your working week.

We will be delving in particular into two issues that are critical for the well-being of the Ocean in our Asia-Pacific region, namely marine plastic pollution and ocean-climate synergies. It is only right that we should address the marine plastic pollution issue, for in this regard South East Asia and East Asia have been identified as the worst-affected regions on the planet.

When it comes to the Ocean-Climate nexus, again we find ourselves at the frontlines. For the great majority of the world's coral is found in Asia-Pacific and many of our Member States are either low-lying island countries or have long stretches of low-lying arable and residential coastal lands. One of the chief effects of global warming and climate change is the warming of the Ocean; and the warming of the Ocean leads inexorably to the death of coral and rising sea levels.

Covering 70% of the earth's surface, absorbing 25% of all CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and 90% of the heat generated by our greenhouse gas emissions, the Ocean is the planet's largest biosphere and climate regulator. Yet the Ocean's intricate link with climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as its central role in providing food, energy, jobs and pharmaceuticals, is still not sufficiently recognized.

Ladies and gentlemen, we all know that Governments and corporations are facing very difficult decisions at this time of planning and managing the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. We must face the fact that prolonged global economic slowdown runs the associated risk of reducing commitment to climate action, and this cannot be allowed to happen. I've already provided two examples, the death of coral and rising sea levels, as to why that should not be countenanced.

So while we are still in the grip of this paralysing pandemic, we should all be examining with great care the routes of economic recovery upon which we will soon be embarking. I firmly believe it is at this time that our voices should be heard in favour of the high road to a clean, green transition, a road I call the Blue-Green Recovery Road.

I know it is hard for decision-makers and breadwinners to think long-term when the short-term exigencies of crisis and supply management are priority. But this is the time when decisions on massive financial commitments are in train, and before the seal is set upon them, we have to ensure that the consequences of taking a low road back to the global-warming, fossil-fuel dependant, plastic-polluting world we knew, are understood and avoided. In the name of our children, I urge Governments, development banks, agencies and corporations to think of our long-term responsibilities and invest now in clean, blue-green infrastructure for a better future for people and planet.

I urge you to think about the six principles that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres laid down in his Earth Day address this year; principles that included ending fossil fuel subsidies, polluters being made to pay for their pollution, and the investment of public

funds into a future of sustainable projects that help the environment and the climate.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have always known that humans and nature are part of one connected system; with nature providing us our water, air, medicine, food and so many other benefits. Lately we have been riding rough-shod over those benefits, taking nature too much for granted, disguising greed in costumes of profit and progress. In these days of reflection, we should remind ourselves that since ancient times, philosophers have urged respect and balance in our relationship with the natural world.

In the end, the Ocean's well-being depends on the drastic lowering of our greenhouse gas emissions. If you care about the Ocean's health, care about those emissions, for from them we witness Ocean acidification, deoxygenation and warming. The self-interest of our species demands that

unprecedented reductions in anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions around the world shape the recovery roads ahead. Only then will we reverse the decline of the Ocean's health and best secure our own.

The role of innovation in securing those reductions is inescapable and we are already seeing positive signs of this in everything from offshore renewable energy to the greening of shipping. Innovation will allow us to move from linear exploitation of finite planetary resources into an era of circular economies, sustainable food systems and resilient cities. And it will lead us to better safeguarding of the biodiversity of nature upon which our lives ultimately depend.

In the Asia-Pacific context, today's webinar is timely. ESCAP Member States recently gathered in an unprecedented *virtual* Commission Session, in which they called upon all relevant stakeholders to

take urgent actions for the conservation and sustainable use of the Ocean. That call included the encouragement at the regional level of policies to reduce marine pollution, to strengthen cooperation and policy coherence, and to promote synergy between Goal 13 on Climate action and Goal 14 on Ocean action. To bring positive action to fine words, I was glad to note that Member States requested the ESCAP Secretariat to continue its work in strengthening partnerships, including through participatory, multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms.

I'd also like to bring attention to ESCAP's recent study "Changing Sails: Accelerating Regional Actions for Sustainable Oceans in Asia and the Pacific" which highlights the importance of the Ocean for life in the Asia-Pacific region, and underscores the need to accelerate action on plastic pollution and the climate crisis. Acceleration of action is integral to our call for the investment of public funds into the sustainable projects envisaged for the Blue-Green recovery road.

Ladies and gentlemen, to conclude my remarks, I recall that the last time I was in Bangkok was to speak at the Asia-Pacific Day for the Ocean. I was very inspired that day by the commitment I observed from our youth and from our NGOs. Please don't think I'm being glib when I say it is that kind of commitment which gives me the fuel I need to push ahead with my Ocean action work. So I encourage you all to tell the world about your goals and your determination, by going to the UN Ocean Conference website and entering more Asia-Pacific voluntary commitments into the register maintained for this purpose at the UN.

I hope to convene again with you on Ocean issues this week at the Virtual Ocean Dialogues being organized courtesy of the World Economic Forum. Registration for the Dialogues is free and the topics covered relate to all of our SDG14 concerns.

And I fully expect to work further with you in preparations for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. And of course, I look forward to convening with you both in person and virtually at the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon.

The challenge to faithfully implement the targets of SDG14 is a global one, but Asia-Pacific has a huge role to play in meeting it. As we say in Fiji, “tabu soro”, no surrender!

I thank you for your attention.