

**Keynote address by Ambassador Peter Thomson, UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean, International Forum, G7 Ministers' Meeting on Climate, Energy and Environment, Tokyo, Japan, 5pm (JST) 6 April 2023**

Minister Akihiro Nishimura,  
State Minister Tsuyoshi Hoshino,  
President Atsushi Sunami,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Warm greetings to all those gathered in Tokyo for this international forum and many thanks to the Sasakawa Peace Foundation for the privilege of addressing you all today.

I'm sure that many of you have heard my daily mantra of, "There can be no healthy planet without a healthy ocean, and the ocean's health has for some time now been measurably in decline." For the love of all that we hold dear, this decline cannot be the inheritance we bequeath to our grandchildren. Intergenerational justice demands a stop to the decline, a great conservation of remaining biodiversity, and a restoring of natural ecosystems wherever and however we can. That, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the tenor of my address today and indeed is the underlying motivation of all my work as the Special Envoy for the Ocean.

In 2015, the Member States of the United Nations universally agreed to the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, with its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, the so-called SDGs. The fourteenth of these is SDG14, which sets out to conserve and sustainably use the ocean resources. Since 2017 I have been charged by the UN Secretary-General with the task of leading United Nations advocacy and public outreach efforts to galvanize political momentum, convene stakeholders, and mobilise action for SDG14 implementation.

As such, I have been intimately involved in the organisation and delivery of the UN Ocean Conferences, the third of which will be held in Nice, France, in June 2025. The conferences exist to support the implementation of SDG14, and in my mind, in 2017 the first conference rang out the alarm bells. The alarm was for the decline that the ocean's health was suffering, as we polluted and over-exploited it, while we simultaneously warmed the seas through our greenhouse gases, thereby causing ocean acidification, stratification and deoxygenation, leading in turn to major changes in marine ecosystems, weakening of vital ocean currents, death of coral, and rising sea levels. After the first UN Ocean Conference, it was no longer acceptable to pretend the ocean's health was robust enough to take anything we cared to afflict it with.

By the time of the second conference, held in Lisbon in June last year, we'd had time to assemble and launch a fleet of solutions to the ocean's problems. Solutions abound. As my Ocean Panel colleague Jane Lubchenco put it recently, "the future is not predetermined, and although we are running out of time, we are not running out of solutions." The third UN Ocean Conference will be held in a little over two years' time in Nice, France, and I see it as a tall lighthouse guiding us, giving good speed for the implementation of SDG14's available solutions.

The urgency of this implementation comes into stark focus when you consider that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has issued a red alert for humanity. Secretary-General Guterres says we have been waging a war against Nature and that before it's too late, it is time for us to make peace. Only through applying already identified solutions, effecting rapid transformational actions, can we make the required peace. And of course, principal amongst these transformational solutions is stopping our use of fossil fuels.

The IPCC's sixth assessment report was released last month. It reaffirms with very high confidence that climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health, and that it is human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, that have unequivocally caused global warming. The report clarifies, again with very high confidence that there is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all.

It points to climate resilient development, integrating adaptation and mitigation to advance sustainable development for all as the way forward. This it states, must be enabled by increased international cooperation, including improved access to adequate financial resources, particularly for vulnerable regions, sectors and groups, and inclusive governance and coordinated policies. The report states with high confidence that the choices and actions implemented during our current decade will have impacts for thousands of years hence.

At the launch of the IPCC Report, Secretary-General Guterres said it is "a how-to guide to defuse the climate time-bomb. It is a survival guide for humanity." For those of us committed to halting the decline in the ocean's health, we heed the report's admonition that rapid and far-reaching transitions across all sectors and systems are necessary to achieve deep and sustained emissions reductions and secure a liveable and sustainable future for all. And we agree with the report's statement that feasible, effective, and low-cost options for mitigation and adaptation are already available.

In that regard we point to the findings of the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy and the conclusion of its global committee of scientific experts that

Ocean-based solutions can deliver up to 21% of the annual greenhouse gas emission cuts needed by 2050 to limit global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius. These solutions include the decarbonisation of shipping, renewable energy from the ocean, sustainable aquaculture, and natural carbon sequestration and storage in coastal and marine ecosystems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I ask that you pay special attention to the words I am about to quote. They come from the G7 Ocean Deal statement adopted at the G7 Leaders' Summit in June last year Germany.

“The ocean’s ecological functions are indispensable for our joint efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change, halt and reverse biodiversity loss, ensure food and nutrition security, and foster sustainable and resilient livelihoods for coastal populations worldwide. We must therefore stop and reverse the overexploitation of natural resources and degradation of the marine environment, and combat the severe level of pollution and the accelerating effects of climate change and biodiversity loss, which are exacerbating cumulative pressures on the ocean.

We note with consternation that the respective ocean related commitments made under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and relevant UNEA resolutions, as well as relevant commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity, are nowhere near sufficiently implemented yet. To limit the catastrophic impacts of climate change on the ocean, it is imperative that all countries align their nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement with a 1.5-degree limit on global average temperature rise, and urgently take action based on the latest available science, including the special report of the IPCC on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate.”

The Ocean Deal commits G7 countries to lead global efforts on the protection, conservation, restoration, and sustainable and equitable use of the global ocean. The statement goes on to set out how the G7 intends to do that through the facilitation of international ocean governance, and the delivery of concrete ocean action within and beyond the G7. It closes with the affirmation that the G7 Ocean Deal will lay the groundwork for further G7 collaboration in this critical decade.

If you have not read the statement, please find it on your browser when you have a spare five minutes today. It is a very powerful statement, one that the global ocean community looks to with high expectations of real progress in the struggle to stop the decline of the ocean’s health.

In the context of today’s meeting, I respectfully table the G7 Ocean Deal, praising its bold commitment and its comprehensive call to action. My purpose in doing so is to

elicit assurance from the G7 Presidency that the G7 Ocean Deal stands firm, that it provides the basis for further G7 collaboration on necessary Ocean Action, and that it is being carried forward at this year's G7 Leaders' Summit in Hiroshima.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Given the fact that the G7 Ocean Deal was adopted in June 2022, I think it is fair to ascribe to it some of the success achieved in Ocean Action over the last twelve months. The G7 statement identified the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon, the Intergovernmental Conference on a BBNJ instrument, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee meetings on plastic pollution, the dialogue on ocean and climate change at the SBSTA of the UNFCCC, and the CBD's COP 15 as crucial stepping-stones for delivery of the G7's commitments and driving future ocean action.

Since then the dialogue on ocean and climate change has taken a step up with the appointment of co-facilitators and the strong showing made by the global ocean community at UNFCCC's COP27, with more to come at COP28 this year. The most effective indicator of success in this dialogue will be a rapid positive movement of climate finance in the direction of conservation and restoration of marine ecosystems and truly sustainable ocean economies.

On the subject of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee's work to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, the first committee session has been successfully held. The second session will be held in Paris in May and humanity has every right to expect the evolution of a robust workable treaty by the end of next year that will allow us to control the plague of plastic pollution we have afflicted upon the environment and thereby ourselves.

At the WTO in Geneva, after twenty years of negotiation, in June last year the Ministerial Council reached agreement on banning of subsidies to the fishing industry supporting exploitation of overfished stock and IUU Fishing. Since then, a new chairman has been appointed for the WTO negotiating group that must work on the second SDG14.6 task at hand, namely the banning of subsidies that support overcapacity in the fishing industry. Hopes are high that this task will be completed in time for the 13<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference in February 2024.

At the end of 2022, at COP15 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, we witnessed the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the inclusion therein of the target of protecting 30% of the planet by 2030. Since the ocean covers more than 70% of the planet's surface, the implications for a great increase in effectively financed and governed marine protected areas are loud and clear.

And then in February this year, the proverbial ship reached the shore with the conclusion of the BBNJ agreement, an international agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. Known popularly as the High Seas Treaty, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres hailed the agreement as “a victory for multilateralism and for global efforts to counter the destructive trends facing ocean health, now and for generations to come.”

As I wrote in a recent article in TIME magazine, it’s too early to say we have stopped the decline in the ocean’s health, for this is a global juggernaut requiring much time and space to make its turn. But there’s no doubt that what was achieved on the ocean’s behalf over the last year has been transformational. That all these consensual agreements have been achieved at a time of grinding distrust in global geopolitics is all the more remarkable, perhaps indicating that when it comes to protecting the ocean, humanity now understands we are all in this together. Together we sink or swim.

We can go so far as to say that multilateralism works when we want it to, and over the last year we have demonstrated that we want it to work in favour of a healthy ocean.

But Ladies and Gentlemen, it is at this point in my remarks today that I must put a firm challenge to G7 Leaders as they approach their June summit in Hiroshima. All of the wonderful consensus of the exalted multilateral agreements I have just described, will be nothing more than moments of celebration if they are not duly ratified and brought into force. For universal implementation and policing of what we have agreed to, we need the international laws to be in place, and this is not the case until sufficient ratifications have been received by the appointed authorities. The pace of this process to date has been painfully slow and many an all-knowing pundit has tried to suck wind from our sails by opining that such multilateral agreements often take decades to achieve sufficient ratifications.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we do not have decades. We have months and maybe a couple of years to achieve finalisation and ratification of these global agreements. In the meantime, the rot continues. Billions of public monies will continue to be spent on subsidies for industrial fishing fleets to continue their pursuit of declining fish-stocks. In the absence of protection, marine ecosystems will continue to diminish before our eyes. The scourge of plastic pollution will continue to fill the ocean with its detritus. The ocean’s health will continue its tragic decline.

I have referred today to the lighthouse shining from Nice. At the beginning of June 2025, we will gather there to assess our progress in stopping and reversing the decline of the ocean’s health. We have two years to get the job done on ratification.

Fail at that, and many will be hanging their heads in shame at the next UN Ocean Conference.

And so, my challenge to G7 Leaders as they approach the Hiroshima Summit, is to stand tall in favour of the required ratifications and to speak out in amplification of the high principles and actions that the G7 Ocean Deal has so powerfully espoused. As ever, action speaks louder than words.

I thank you for your kind attention.

-----