

# **Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson, President of the 71<sup>st</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly, at the Parliamentary Hearing entitled “A World of Blue: Preserving the Oceans, Safeguarding the Planet, Ensuring Human Well-being in the Context of the 2030 Agenda”**

**13 February 2017**

Honorable Saber Chowdhury, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Honorable, Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Under-Secretary-General Wu, UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs

Distinguished Parliamentarians from across the world,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations for the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s 2017 Parliamentary Hearing.

The IPU’s Annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations recognises the critical role parliamentarians play as standard bearers, policy shapers, and legislative decision-makers in our societies around the world. I wish to emphasize today the importance of tapping into this leadership in our efforts to forge collective global responses to the challenges of our age.

The Annual Parliamentary Hearings provide the central opportunity for collaboration between the world’s parliamentarians and the United Nations. They provide us the best platform for jointly identifying, discussing and finding solutions to address the pressing issues facing the world.

With this in mind, the decision to dedicate the 2017 Annual Parliamentary Hearing to the subject of 'Preserving the Ocean, safeguarding the planet, and ensuring human well-being in the context of the 2030 Agenda' is most welcome.

As I am sure you are all aware, the health of the Ocean is caught in a cycle of serious decline. Human activity has caused this state of affairs, thus it must be human activity that reverses the cycle. If we fail as an international community to take decisive action in these pivotal times, we may well pass the point of recovery for much of Ocean's life forms

The Ocean is essentially 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 percent of the oxygen we breathe.

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

The Ocean is also the lynchpin of our global ecosystem. It is home to nearly 200,000 distinct identified species, although the actual numbers are estimated to be in the millions.

It is at the heart of the delicate and complex relationship between the environment, climate, life on land, and life beneath the water.

We are all bound by the Ocean as a source of food, livelihoods, and life, with the economic activities generated by the Ocean estimated to be worth around USD\$24 trillion per year.

To put it bluntly, without a healthy and sustainable Ocean, humanity's place on this planet will be in jeopardy.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In our deliberations this week, we should not lose sight of the fact that marine pollution is cluttering the Ocean and choking our marine-life; immense gyres of garbage are circulating out in the high seas, hypoxic dead zones are growing along our coasts; and overfishing and IUU fishing are threatening the sustainability of fish stocks.

While the impacts of climate change are raising sea levels, they are also acidifying the Ocean, bleaching coral reefs and warming tropical waters to the detriment of marine life. It must be obvious to all that these changes will threaten human habitat, food security, livelihoods and well-being. Thus the Annual Parliamentary Hearing's Ocean theme could not be more timely or significant.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Taken together with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, when world leaders came together in September 2015 to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, they provided humanity with a universal masterplan for a sustainable future.

In so doing, they deliberately recognised that to achieve a sustainable future for humanity on this planet, dedicated action was needed to conserve and sustainably use the Ocean's resources. The required action was captured in Sustainable Development Goal 14, informally known as the Ocean's Goal.

Indeed, through SDG14 and the targets and indicators that underpin it, we have before us a roadmap for overcoming Ocean's woes and maintaining its health.

But of course to make SDG14's implementation successful, there must be a universal push towards its fulfilment. It is for this reason that the United Nations will be hosting The Ocean Conference from 5-9 June, here in New York.

Co-hosted by the Governments of Sweden and Fiji, the Ocean Conference is being held to support the implementation of SDG14 and drive action to reverse the cycle of decline in which the Ocean is caught.

There will be three key outcomes from the conference.

The first will be a 'Call for Action' declaration that will provide a universal political commitment to drive implementation forward.

The second will be the compilation of a registry of voluntary commitments, through which Governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, the scientific and academic communities, and other partners, will register commitments to action to support all aspects of SDG14 implementation.

The third will be a conference report that will capture these elements and galvanize action in the years ahead.

On Wednesday and Thursday this week, the preparatory meeting for the Ocean Conference will be held here at the United Nations. Thus the IPU Parliamentary Hearing kicks off a pivotal week in support of the Ocean's welfare.

I therefore encourage you to make the best use of this opportunity for collaboration. I also invite you to come to The Ocean Conference in June armed with regional, national and local-level commitments to reinforce the global effort.

For those wishing to make a positive contribution by registering voluntary commitments, you are welcome to be in touch with either my Office, the co-Presidents of the

Conference, Fiji and Sweden, or the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Also a U.N. website is being established this week for the purpose of registering voluntary commitments.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Ocean Conference is the only universal forum mandated by all 193 UN Member States that sets out to support the faithful implementation of SDG14. Thus if you care about the sustainability of the Ocean's resources, I urge you to get involved.

In this landmark year for Ocean action, parliamentarians have an invaluable contribution to make.

You are entrusted with representing the interests of the people, with advancing the rule of law, with promoting democratic values, and with protecting people's interests when challenges threaten our communal future.

Your leadership in introducing policies and establishing legal frameworks will be critical in driving efforts to restore the sustainability of the Ocean. I call on you to use this power in pursuit of humanity's common good.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the next two days, in many chambers around the UN campus, detailed discussions will be held on the urgent actions needed to protect the Ocean. I'm sure all of us want these actions to find their way to successful implementation, so that our children and all those who come after them will know the joy and the sustenance that Ocean's bounty provided to us all in our youth. Let us not deny them.

I wish you all the best for your deliberations this week.

I thank you