

OPENING REMARKS

BY

**H.E. MR. COLLEN V. KELAPILE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC)**

AT THE PLENARY

**2022 UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE TO SUPPORT THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 14:
CONSERVE AND SUSTAINABLY USE THE OCEANS, SEAS, AND
MARINE RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**27 JUNE 2022
10:00 – 13:00 HOURS
LISBON, PORTUGAL**

Please check against delivery.

- **Excellencies, Co-Presidents of the Conference;**
- **President of the United Nations General Assembly, Abdulla Shahid;**
- **Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres;**
- **Excellencies, Heads of State and Government;**
- **Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

1. It is a distinct honor for me to participate and deliver some opening remarks at this historic **2022 United Nations Ocean Conference**.

2. At the outset, I commend the Governments of Portugal and Kenya for co-hosting this important and timely Conference and the Mayor of Lisbon for welcoming us in this beautiful coastal city.

3. I applaud the Co-Presidents for ably organizing this Conference, and I wish them a successful outcome, with tangible actionable commitments and targets that should perfectly also reinforce the mandate of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Excellencies,

4. ECOSOC plays a significant role in monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in promoting the three dimensions of sustainable development – the economic, social and environmental. The Council is therefore the home of all the SDGs.

5. This **2022 United Nations Ocean Conference** offers a perfect opportunity to take stock of the implementation of **SDG14 on Life Below Water** dealing with conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

6. This is a critical moment to decisively address the combined impacts of the triple planetary crises of our time -- **climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution** which have been aggravated by the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

7. It is urgently imperative that we exert more effort to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

8. Healthy and well-managed oceans, seas and marine resources are fundamental to saving our planet, and supporting our livelihoods and prosperity for all as well as the survival of all other species.
9. Our well-being is inextricably linked to the health and sustainable productivity of our oceans, as more than **3 billion people** rely on oceans for their livelihoods.
10. The world's oceans contribute to poverty eradication, sustained economic growth, global trade and food security.
11. Notwithstanding these benefits, inconsiderate human activities are increasingly undermining the health and productivity of the oceans and our environment and thus escalating the climate crisis.

12. As highlighted in the recently released report of the Secretary-General on **Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals**, the world's oceans and seas continue to rapidly deteriorate due to increased acidification, eutrophication and plastic waste -- endangering the planet's largest ecosystem and billions of livelihoods, with small-scale fisher communities the hardest hit.

13. Our activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have also worsened the health of the oceans, with plastic waste having steadily infested the world's oceans as a result of increase in single-use plastic primarily from medical waste.

Excellencies,

14. Against this backdrop, I am pleased that we are gathered here today to reflect on ways we can join hands and strengthen conservation and sustainable use of the oceans.
15. I am optimistic that inclusive discussions of this nature -- involving world leaders and policy-makers, scholars, experts, scientists, activists, youth and civil society and other stakeholders -- can contribute to safeguard oceans' health and chart a new path for their conservation and sustainable use.
16. Above all, the outcomes of this Conference will assist in sharing experiences and useful ideas to mobilize oceans action, generate new and much more ambitious commitments, strengthen and forge new partnerships that promote science-based innovative solutions.

Excellencies,

17. The **High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)** that I will convene soon after this Conference from **5 to 15 July** in New York under the auspices of ECOSOC will undertake in-depth review of, amongst other Goals, SDG14.
18. This will be the second time that this Goal is reviewed in-depth after its initial review in 2017, when the first UN Ocean Conference was held.
19. This Conference is therefore both important and timely because it will provide essential inputs to this year's HLPF.

20. The HLPF will focus in particular on the interlinkages and synergies between SDG 14 and the other Goals.

21. As you would be aware, this year's ECOSOC and HLPF theme is: "***Building Back Better from the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) While Advancing the Full Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.***"

22. The review of SDG14 is also significant, given the devastating impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on ocean-based economies, fisheries, aquaculture and tourism.

23. The implementation of SDG 14 depends on reimagining the human relationship with the oceans. This, in turn, depends on building ocean awareness through mobilizing public concern, including by fostering ocean literacy and local action.

24. I believe that a more universal concern for oceans' health, and the common benefits that can be derived from healthy and productive oceans, may also assist to address the existing funding gap for ocean action.

25. I hope that the deliberations at this Conference will reinvigorate commitments, partnerships and action towards achieving SDG 14 and strengthen the science-policy interface to support sustainable oceans management.

Excellencies,

26. The **Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)** that are presented at the HLPF are an important mechanism for knowledge-sharing and peer-learning in the implementation of all the SDGs.

27. I am encouraged that recent VNRs highlighted the importance of conserving the marine ecosystem and biodiversity.

28. I am gratified that this year's **44 VNR countries** emphasized their commitment to reducing plastic waste and marine litter and addressing the problem of micro-plastic.

29. In addition, several VNR countries noted the importance of strengthening institutional capacity in the areas of marine science and the blue economy and the need to protect fisheries resources.

30. As we build back better and greener, the transition to a sustainable ocean-based economy is one of the most viable growth paths for a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular for the most vulnerable countries.

31. As President of ECOSOC, I will continue in the remainder of my tenure to ensure that the Council's forums such as the upcoming HLPF are effectively used to build a more equitable and sustainable future and development.

32. Achieving this will also require mobilization of the critically needed political will, innovation and decisive action to protect our oceans and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

33. Let me close, **Co-Presidents**, by reassurance that the Council remains at your disposal to serve as an inclusive platform in addressing the myriad of challenges we face today and in the future.

I thank you for your kind attention.