

## **Ambassador Blockert's speech at the briefing on the United Nations high-level "The Ocean Conference".**

First of all let me welcome you to this briefing on the UN high-level oceans conference, The Ocean Conference, that will be held in New York in June this year. This briefing is co-organised by the Permanent Missions of Fiji and Sweden, together with UNCTAD, and is also supported by the Mission of Argentina and UNDESA.

The objective with this briefing is two-fold. First we feel that it is important to increase awareness and engagement surrounding SDG 14, the "Oceans Goal", simply because it is a goal that relates to the work being done in Geneva in a number of different areas.

Second, perhaps the strongest link between SDG 14 and Geneva is fisheries. A number of issues related to fisheries are being discussed here on a regular basis in several different organisations and contexts. And of course we also have ongoing negotiations within the WTO on fisheries subsidies.

In the first segment today we will therefore hear from some of the major players in the preparations for The Ocean Conference, with more details about their work. In the second segment we will have a discussion in the light of UNCTAD's Trade and Environment Review 2016, which this time focuses on trade in fish. The event will then be concluded by the Ambassador from Argentina.

Before I hand over the floor to our esteemed panelists, I want to say a few words about Sweden's engagement in The Ocean Conference.

The successful implementation of SDG 14, to conserve and sustainably use the oceans and seas, remains a top priority for Sweden. We are very proud of our strong tradition as champions of the environment. We find it very appropriate that the first Ocean Conference in New York will begin, on the day, 45 years after the first UN conference on the environment opened in Stockholm in 1972. A ground-breaking event that turned the environment into a major issue at the international level, and drew together developing and developed countries.

The oceans support all life on earth. To survive and prosper, we need healthy oceans. Currently, our oceans and seas are in a critical state: since 1970, we have experienced a 49% decline in marine species populations; by 2050, there are claims that there will be more plastic than fish in the world's oceans; at current projected levels of ocean warming and acidification, there is an increasing concern that by 2050, coral reefs could be lost from most areas.

While the adoption of Agenda 2030 and SDG 14 serve as a starting point, guiding policy development and implementation over the next 15 years, now is the time to come forward with ambitious implementation commitments that are translated into effective collaborative action to protect the oceans.

Therefore, we are proud to have taken the initiative, together with Fiji, to realise this conference on oceans. We're encouraged by the strong response from all parts of the UN System, the knowledge

community and civil society, as well as UN Member States. This has reassured us of the readiness of the international community to come together and take action.

The importance of broad stakeholder participation leading up to and at the conference cannot be overstated. We need the engagement of all relevant stakeholders to bring forward sustainable solutions and initiate real change.

The Ocean Conference will focus on solutions and practical recommendations. It will reinforce existing processes and provide great opportunities to mobilise the necessary leadership and the right partnerships to support the implementation of SDG 14.

The Conference outcome will have three elements: an inter-governmentally agreed declaration – the Call for Action; a summary of the partnership dialogues; and a list of voluntary commitments for the implementation of SDG 14.

Ambitious voluntary commitments for the implementation of SDG 14 are of critical importance to the success of the Conference. We need a clear map of what different stakeholders are bringing to the table for the implementation of the 7 targets under SDG 14.

The aim of the partnership dialogues is to, firstly, present a current scientific update, including gaps, challenges and opportunities relating to each theme, and secondly, to focus on solutions and practical recommendations to address these challenges. Making the partnership dialogues as fruitful as possible is of utmost importance.

Like I said initially, SDG 14 connects with number of ongoing activities in Geneva. Most obvious is perhaps the connection with the negotiations in the WTO on fisheries subsidies. These negotiations have been ongoing for a long time, but we do see a renewed momentum right now. Several proposals have already been tabled, and we know that there are more in the pipeline.

It is clear that a large majority of WTO members are committed to try to deliver a result on fisheries subsidies for MC11 that will be held in Buenos Aires in December. Our hope is that The Ocean Conference can be an important stepping stone towards this objective.

But this is a two-way relationship of course. Progress in WTO could provide momentum not only for The Ocean Conference, but more importantly, to a successful implementation of SDG 14. Because let's face it, without a multilateral agreement on how to tackle IUU fisheries and subsidies that undermine sustainable fisheries, it will be much more difficult to live up to our commitments in SDG 14.

The world's oceans and seas are fundamental in eradicating poverty, safeguarding food security and prosperity for countless people. With this in mind, it is crucial to make the most of the rich opportunities created by The Ocean Conference: to bring stakeholders together and inspire dialogue and action by providing a platform for engagement; and to reinforce existing initiatives and raise the profile of oceans issues.

In that regard, before I conclude, I would also like to point you to an incredibly valuable resource: [oceanactionhub.org](http://oceanactionhub.org), a knowledge platform for the implementation of SDG 14 developed by the UN System, with the support of Sweden.

The process leading up to the Conference needs to be much wider than just what happens in New York. There is a clear role for Geneva here. Because finally and most of all, we must ensure that we have a global plan for the successful implementation of SDG 14.