

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Keynote Speech

The SDGs and Climate Changes: Challenges and Opportunities

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Hon. Moon Seong-Hyeok, Minister of Ocean & Fisheries, Hon. Lim Ki-Tack, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, Mr. Ariel Hernán Troisi, Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC-UNESCO), Exc. Xing Haiming, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Korea, Dr. Kim Woong-Seo, President of the Korea Institute of Ocean Science & Technology, Dr. Chang Young-Tae, President of the Korea Maritime Institute,

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen, It is my great honor and privilege to address the 2020 Sustainable Development Forum for the Yellow Sea especially at a time when we need to work towards addressing COVID-19 and the climate crisis.

Weather extremities, such as droughts, floods, typhoons, and wildfires, have become more frequently unfolding over the years. Deadly wildfires raged on Russia, Australia and the US. Korea had the longest monsoon on record.

There is no doubt that these natural disasters are caused by climate change. More importantly, we must note that the current disasters are only a prelude to a looming climate crisis.

Many experts say that ecological destruction by humans and the climate crisis are the underlying causes of the new infectious disease like COVID-19. Climate change progresses in a more subtle and gradual way compared to COVID-19, but its impact is incomparably more disastrous. If we fail to respond now, we will inevitably face catastrophic consequences.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Based on the consensus that humanity's sustainability is at serious risk, the 17 Goals were adopted by all UN member states in 2015,

The UN has adopted these 17 SDGs, envisaging a world free of poverty, hunger, and disease, a world that offers equal opportunities and a world where all life can thrive based on mutual trust, regardless of country of origin, ethnicity, race, gender or generation.

In SDGs achievement, the ocean's role is critical. The ancient Greek epic poet Homer once called the ocean "the source of all." Indeed, the ocean is indispensable to humanity's survival as it hosts the full spectrum of marine life and it is where a wide range of economic activities take place.

Among the 17 Goals, one with a direct correlation is Goal number 14: "Life below water."

However, other Goals also have much relevance to the ocean.

For example, Since prehistoric times, people have consumed important nutrients, such as proteins and dietary fiber, from the ocean. So, the ocean is one of the main tool to achieve goal number 2: Zero-Hunger.

As proposed by the EU, ocean energy could satisfy 15% of EU power demand in 2050. As such, the ocean is a natural reservoir of renewables, such as offshore wind, wave power, tidal power, and marine biofuel. Thus, this is closely aligned with the Goal number 7: "Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all."

As more than 95% of the world's trade volume is being transported through the sea, maritime infrastructure is vitally important to sustain international trade. In particular, for Korea that is largely dependent on foreign trade, stable supply and recovery of infrastructure in offshore regions is critical for its sustainable development.

It is also deeply concerning that a significant amount of land waste is flowing into the sea. Therefore, protection of the marine environment and integrated management of the land and sea are equally important to achieve SDGs as a whole.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, we learned the hard way that self-serving actions only put us all at risk.

In order for us to respond to climate change and achieve SDGs, we need even greater collective efforts of the international community than what is required for the COVID-19 response. In this context, I would like to touch on the recent US Presidential election results from November 3rd.

As you may all be aware, President-elect Biden has not only proposed the 2050 net-zero target as well as a \$2 trillion investment in the Green New Deal, but also pledged to return to the Paris Climate Change Agreement. Upon entering a New Climate Regime in 2021, I wholeheartedly welcome the return of the US to the Paris Climate Change Agreement. It will restore and strengthen global solidarity.

In particular, Mr. Biden's appointment of the former Secretary of State John Kerry as special presidential envoy for climate change clearly demonstrates that response to climate change is going to be a top priority of the incoming administration.

The Earth does not await us. In April 2018, His Holiness Pope Francis said to me, and I quote, "God always forgives, human beings sometimes forgive, but nature never forgives."

There is only one way out. Before reaching the tipping point where the Earth cannot hold any longer, humanity must change first and achieve a bold innovative reform on the socio-economic structure.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

We should no longer fall for the divisive notion that environmental protection and economic growth are mutually exclusive. There should be a green paradigm shift in almost all aspects of our lives.

Without such a paradigm shift, we will continue to encounter the vicious cycle of viral outbreaks. In the post-coronavirus era, we should have SDGs serve as the foundation of our economic mechanism.

In fact, it is highly encouraging to see the global movement of green transitions, to overcome the economic crisis brought by COVID-19.

Last July, the Korean government announced the Green New Deal. To achieve green transition, the following three points should be considered as our future direction to take.

First, there should be a clear and consistent vision that ensures the Green New Deal serves as not a mere economic stimulus but a socioeconomic transformation. The Green New Deal should be focused on a just and inclusive transition where no one is left behind. To that end, it has to be interlinked with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Second, as of now, around 110 countries have considered declaring net-zero targets to limit the global average temperature rise to 1.5°C by 2100. The EU has set the net-zero target for 2050 as its top priority. China, the largest greenhouse gas emitter, also pledged to become carbon neutral by 2060 at the UN General Assembly last September 22.

Finally, on October 28, President Moon Jae-in of Korea announced Korea's ambitious plan to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. I wholeheartedly welcome Korea's determination. I sincerely hope that concrete action plans and policy roadmap are drawn up in accordance with the 2050 target as quickly as possible.

Third, taking a more fundamental approach to green transition, I would like to emphasize the importance of environmental education for our future generations. For sustainable development, an individual's thoughts and actions should change first in order to bring about constructive change in the society as a whole. In particular, our children who will become the future leaders should learn how important it is to cherish and live in harmony with our mother nature, including the ocean.

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

Climate change is not a problem of tomorrow but is affecting people today. Decisions made by humanity today will change not only their lives tomorrow but also the lives of generations to come.

Today's forum presents a meaningful opportunity for policymakers and researchers to share insights and discuss sustainable development strategy in the marine industry. Your engagement today will be the first step to protecting our only planet Earth. I look forward to a greater role of the KMI that has put together this special event. The number of confirmed cases has been increasing lately. Please take care and I hope we can all be happy and healthy in the COVID-free world next year.

Thank you.