

**Mr. David Wilkes, representative of Germany,
on behalf of the Eastern European and Other States Group**

Madame Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary General, Excellencies, esteemed Delegates to the International Seabed Authority, Distinguished Scholars, esteemed Judges, esteemed representatives of Jamaica, ladies and gentlemen.

Germany is currently chairing the Group of Western European and other States. It is on behalf of this regional group that I have the honour to address the most distinguished audience convened today here in Kingston, at the seat of the International Seabed Authority, to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of this outstanding institution. I take pride in exercising this task made all the more challenging by the array of distinguished speakers who have taken the floor before me and who aptly represent and embody the achievements of the Authority since its inception 20 years ago.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea was opened for signature thirty-two years ago at Montego Bay, here in Jamaica. The Convention is the radiant result of a great effort undertaken by the international community to conceive a universal legal order for our oceans; oceans which cover more than two-thirds of our planet's surface. The Convention is the embodiment of the international law of the sea. It reflects and accommodates legal ideas and convictions which date back to the era of enlightenment. It was conceived as the Ocean's Constitution, the legal framework within which all the activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. The Convention has since its adoption proven effective and flexible to meet the challenges which ensue from these activities.

In its Part XI and its Implementation Agreement of 1994, the Convention sets the framework for the exploration and exploitation of the Area's abounding mineral resources. In doing so, the Convention avails itself of the notion so brilliantly conceived by the Maltese Ambassador Arvid Pardo leading the negotiations of the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea, namely that the deep seabed and the resources are the "common heritage of mankind". At the core of the groundbreaking concept stands the conviction that the Area's mineral resources belong to all. Being common to all mankind, they need to be governed commonly, internationally and consensually under the auspices of a neutral international organization. This organization is the International Seabed Authority whose 20th Anniversary we have today come together to celebrate.

Mr. President, the Governments of the Western European and other States Group were instrumental in advocating Jamaica as the seat of the ISA. We are proud of having contributed to the international community's decision to bring this unique institution to this beautiful island. Our ties with Jamaica are sound and strong.

Twenty years later, we can indeed state and put on record that the Authority has developed impressively and achieved a great deal. The Authority, now encompassing 166 members, has literally come of age. The timing for the celebration is very fitting. Not only to look back but also to throw a glance at the future, just as the Authority is now, full of life and energy, looking ahead to its future. All of

us have witnessed the remarkable momentum which mineral exploration activities in the Area and at its core, the Authority, have gained, especially over the last two to three years. The number of contractors is ever increasing. With the Council having approved all seven pending applications, the Authority will have 26 approved exploration contracts after this anniversary session.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Western European and other States Group very much welcomes this development and this success of the Authority. The delegations on whose behalf I have the honour to speak here today have been active members and committed supporters of the Authority throughout its existence. I even dare say that the Authority has grown dear to us. The commitment is also reflected by the fact that 7 of the ISA's approved contracts have been sponsored by WEOG member States as well as by cooperation projects of WEOG members with partners worldwide and in particular, with developing countries.

Mr. Secretary-General, please allow me to also express and reiterate the WEOG governments' utmost appreciation of the ceaseless efforts which you and your staff have over so many years invested in the Authority's work. We value your extensive knowledge and expertise, your diplomatic skill, though you keep denying them, and your humour. Please be assured of our continuous support.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we are approaching the expiry of the first explorations contracts and are now looking forward to the beginning of the exploitation phase, an array of new challenges unfolds before us, challenges we are very much willing to meet together. To highlight just a few: first and foremost we need to develop the exploitation regulations and thereby complete the Mining Code. Aside from that there is the need for greater standardization of the data the Authority receives. The workload of the Authority's organs has been increasing constantly. This particularly relates to the task of reviewing and administering the array of exploration contracts. Directly linked to that, there was and is the increasing need to streamline the Authority's budget and involve contractors in contributing to the Authority's financial resources. During last year's session, we jointly addressed this necessity and introduced the instrument of overhead charges whose implementation is still on-going.

As to the exploitation regulations, I would like to applaud the Secretary-General for having launched the first Stakeholder Survey of the Authority. He has thereby begun a process of stakeholder engagement and consultation on this very important matter. Let us all share the knowledge and experience which we have gathered on the deep seabed's ecosystems. We extend our hand to the Authority and to our partners throughout the world. Let us together undertake every endeavor to reconcile our common interest in deep seabed mining with the need to protect the deep seabed environment.

Thank you very much.