ISA Concludes 15th Session

At its 120th meeting, the Assembly elected Mario José Pino of Argentina as its President for the 15th Session of the International Seabed Authority. Following consultations within the regional groups, the representatives of India (Asian Group of States), South Africa (African Group of States), New Zealand (Group of Western European and Other States) and the Russian Federation (Group of Eastern European and Other States) were elected as Vice-Presidents.

Also at its 120th and 124th meetings of the Assembly, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Commonwealth Secretariat were invited as observers to participate at ISA meetings.

Legal and Technical Commission

The Legal and Technical Commission held 15 meetings commencing 8 to 27 May 2009, one week in advance of the 15th Session meetings of the Council and Assembly.

The Commission considered the annual reports from the eight contractors; considered a proposal for a network of areas of particular environmental interest in the Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone; issued financial recommendations for the guidance of contractors under regulation 38 of the Regulations on Prospecting and Exploration for Polymetallic Nodules in the Area and finalized its recommendations to the Council on the draft regulations on prospecting and exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the Area. The Commission elected Sandor Mulsow Flores (Chile) as Chairman and Andrzej Przybycin (Poland) as Vice-Chairman.

Mahmoud Samy of Egypt was elected President of the Council for the 15th Session. The representatives of Bangladesh (Asian Group), Poland (Eastern European States Group), Mexico (Latin American and Caribbean States Group) and Canada (Western European and Other States Group) were elected as Vice-Presidents.

The main items of business for the Council were the continuation of its consideration of the revised draft regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides which it had commenced at the 13th session in 2007 and continued throughout the 14th session in 2008. Despite intensive work by all delegations, Council was not able to complete its consideration of the proposed revisions. Discussions will continue at the next session with a view to adopting the draft regulations.
The “Exploration and exploitation of deep seabed mineral resources in the Area: challenges for Africa and opportunities for collaborative research in the South Atlantic Ocean” seminar was held in Abuja, 24-26 March 2009.

It followed a similar sensitization seminar held in Brazil in November 2008, where participants developed a proposal for collaborations by the States bordering the South and Equatorial Atlantic Ocean for increased research on the mineral resources in that part of the Area.

The seminar in Nigeria discussed proposal and possible collaboration among the States of the region.

The technical sessions at the seminar were broadly grouped under four themes, as follows:

(a) The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of the Convention;
(b) Other institutions created by the Convention;
(c) The work of the International Seabed Authority; and,
(d) Possible areas of collaboration among West and Central African States and among States bordering the South and Equatorial Atlantic Oceans,

The seminar was opened by the Minister of Transport of the Government of Nigeria, Alhaji Ibrahim Isa Bio, who commended the efforts of the International Seabed Authority in ensuring that all nations, especially developing countries, are part of the deep seabed mineral resources development process. He urged African nations to become actively involved in the work of the Authority for the socio-economic benefit of the region. The Seminar was chaired by Governor (Chief Servant) of Niger State, Dr. Muazu Babangida Aliyu, who highlighted the importance of the seminar and said that it

**Recommendations of the Nigeria Seminar:**

The main recommendations of the seminar were that African member States of the International Seabed Authority:

(i) Participate more actively in deliberations at sessions of the Authority and its seminars and workshops;
(ii) Organize more and frequent sensitization seminars at the country level;
(iii) Establish dedicated inter-ministerial working groups to coordinate activities in their marine sectors, with a view to devising plans to optimize resource development in this sector and in the Area, taking into account the relevant provisions of the Convention;
(iv) Encourage their nationals, through existing and new institutions, to develop the appropriate skills in marine sciences, protection of the marine environment and resource development to take advantage of the economic possibilities that have been made available by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea;
(v) Facilitate intra-African and international cooperation to obtain the necessary skills and resources to develop the mineral and fisheries resources within their exclusive economic zones, extended continental shelves and in the Area;
(vi) Establish the necessary framework to make effective use of the Authority’s endowment fund and source funds from other donors for human resources development and training in the region;
(vii) Explore with the assistance of the Authority, possibilities of cooperation with polymetallic nodule contractor countries to get hands-on experience in marine mineral resource exploration and environmental studies;
(viii) Actively pursue the proposals for cooperation with Brazil and India, as proposed in their respective presentations.

**ISA and China Sign Memorandum of Understanding**

The Authority recently signed a MOU with China to further strengthen the existing cooperation in issues relating to the international seabed in the field of geological modeling of new mineral resources; the establishment of technical standards for marine protected areas (MPAs) and to assist in aspects of personnel training and marine science popularization. In line with the cooperation, COMRA will invite young marine scientists from developing countries to participate in its scientific cruises with travel costs to be covered by the ISA Endowment Fund.
would create much needed awareness of the activities of the Authority and the enormous potential for commercial mining of deep seabed minerals in the Equatorial and South Atlantic Ocean.

The Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority, Nil A. Odunton, speaking on the occasion, assured the gathering that the Authority would provide whatever assistance was possible to the region in its efforts to develop deep-sea mineral resources. Over 120 participants from different organizations from Nigeria and other western African countries took part in the deliberations where presentations were followed by question and answer sessions. Plenary discussions also centred on the theme of collaboration amongst the countries bordering the South Atlantic region.

The seminar also recommended that the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority address the next Heads of State meeting of the African Union to sensitize policymakers on marine mineral resources of the Area, and on the need for the region to be actively engaged in this programme, and requested that all African countries participate in the global programme to forestall the possibility of missing out on the benefits accruable from the "Common Heritage of Mankind".

Presentations made on the known deep-sea mineral resources and the work of the Authority covered different types and distribution of marine mineral resources and the legal framework for activities in the Area, with special emphasis on the regulations for prospecting and exploration for polymetallic nodules.

ISA and OSPAR

In 2008, the Authority attended an informal meeting with the Secretariat of the OSPAR Commission and the NEAFC.

At the meeting it was agreed that in view of the overlapping jurisdictions and mandates of OSPAR, NEAFC and the ISA, and in particular the ISA mandate with respect to the seabed beyond the limits of national jurisdiction of the OSPAR Convention Area, a dialogue be established to ensure that marine protected areas are established with due regard to the rights and duties of States as set out in the 1982 Convention and the 1994 Agreement as well as with full respect for the jurisdiction of the Authority to manage activities in the Area.

At the same time, the Authority took note of the comprehensive scientific justification for the establishment of a marine protected area at the Charlie Gibbs fracture zone prepared by the OSPAR Commission.

Following this meeting, the ISA Secretariat was invited to provide a more detailed commentary on the work of the Authority, with particular reference to the measures taken by the Authority, including its rules, regulations and procedures established for the conduct of prospecting and exploration in the Area to the OSPAR Working Group on Marine Protected Areas, Species and Habitats.

In this regard, the ISA Secretariat made a presentation on the measures taken by the Authority for the protection of the marine environment, at a seminar on the implementation of the European Union Marine Strategy Framework Directive in areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, convened by the French Presidency of the European Union at Brest, France in December 2008.

The OSPAR Heads of Delegation acknowledged the mandate of the Authority as the competent organization to regulate deep seabed mining and welcomed a suggestion to develop a memorandum of understanding between the OSPAR Commission and the Authority in order to ensure appropriate coordination of measures between the two organizations. A similar memorandum of understanding was concluded between the OSPAR Commission and NEAFC in 2008.

At its recent 15th Session, the Assembly directed the Authority to work with the secretariat of the OSPAR Commission to develop a memorandum of understanding.

ISA and ICPC

The International Cable Protection Committee Secretariat (ICPC) is the industry organization that represents the submarine cable industry. Its principal purpose is to promote the safeguarding of submarine cables against man-made and natural hazards and also provides a forum for the exchange of technical and legal information pertaining to submarine cable protection methods and programmes. It currently has 95 members representing 54 countries who co-operate closely with mining and welcomed a memorandum of understanding between the OSPAR Commission and the Authority in order to ensure appropriate coordination of measures between the two organizations. A similar memorandum of understanding was concluded between the OSPAR Commission and NEAFC in 2008.

At its recent 15th Session, the Assembly directed the Authority to work with the secretariat of the OSPAR Commission to develop a memorandum of understanding.

ISA is a mechanism by which 15 governments of the western coasts of Europe and the European Community cooperate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic.
Scientists, policymakers, environmentalists, and industry representatives gathered recently at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) in April to discuss the issue of mining precious metals from the seafloor, the sustainable use of these resources and potential environmental impacts.

The public colloquium featured keynote addresses from leading voices on the subject followed by a panel discussion.

Speakers at the colloquium were Nii A. Odunton, Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority; Caitlyn Antrim, Executive Director for the Rule of Law Committee for the Oceans; Rod Eggert, the Division Director for Economics and Business at the Colorado School of Mines; and Maurice Tivey, a geologist at WHOI who studies these unique deep sea environments. They were joined by Samantha Smith, Environmental Manager of Nautilus Minerals Inc.; Sabine Christiansen of the World Wildlife Fund; and Chris German, a WHOI geochemist.

In his presentation, Mr. Odunton spoke about deep sea mining of seafloor massive sulphides and the role of the Authority in ensuring sustainable development of these resources in the Area.

He added that the Authority was currently engaged in developing further regulations to deal with prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the Area. He said one of the several difficulties in regulating these resources lay in the fact that knowledge of these resources were still inadequate.

In administering the mineral resources of the Area, Mr. Odunton said the Authority was required to ensure effective protection of the marine environment, and therefore biodiversity, from harmful effects which may arise both from exploration for, and subsequent exploitation of, these resources. In addition, the Authority has a general responsibility to promote and encourage the conduct of marine scientific research in the Area, and to coordinate and disseminate the results of such research and analysis.

He continued that the Authority was also in the process of establishing a framework to successfully manage threats to the marine environment and its biodiversity from activities in the Area, through its regulations on prospecting and exploration for the different types of mineral resources known to exist there.
In May 2009, prior to the 15th Session of the Authority, Secretary-General Nii A. Odunton hosted a luncheon meeting with Permanent Representatives based in Kingston.

At the meeting, he updated representatives on the progress of the work of the Authority and the various projects it was involved in.

Mr. Odunton said he hoped to host regular informal meetings as a medium to keep member states informed of the activities of the International Seabed Authority.

Did you know that the longest mountain range is underwater? Under the Atlantic Ocean the longest mountain range in the world, the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, runs right down the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Under the Pacific Ocean the tallest mountain on the planet is not Mt. Everest, which is only 29,028 ft/8848 m high. The tallest mountain in the world is actually Mauna Kea, in Hawaii, which is closer to 31,000 ft/9449 m high - only thing is — you can’t see the two-thirds of the mountain that is underwater. Way under the Pacific Ocean, the deepest place on the surface of the planet is the Mariana Trench, to the east of Guam. If Mt. Everest were put into the deepest part of the Mariana Trench, there would be just 1m/1.6km of water on top of it!

NEW & FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS:

- Exploration and exploitation of deep seabed mineral resources in the Area: Challenges for Africa and opportunities for collaborative research in the South Atlantic Ocean
- Cobalt-Rich Crusts and the Diversity and Distribution Patterns of Seamount Fauna
- Polymetallic Nodule Mining Technology - Current Status and Challenges Ahead
- Selected Decisions of the 15th Session [En|Fr|Es] -
- Handbook 2010