



**75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly
Agenda Item 76(a) Oceans and the Law of the Sea**

United Nations Headquarters, New York City

8 December 2020

STATEMENT

By H.E. Michael W. Lodge,
Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

Thank you, Mr/Madame President,

It is my great honor to deliver this statement on behalf of His Excellency Mr Michael W. Lodge, Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority, who could not be present today in-person to deliver his speech.

Celebrating the ongoing importance of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

In the context of the annual debate on the Oceans and the Law of the Sea it is always relevant to recall the contemporary importance for orderly international relations of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Convention has established certainty in the law of the sea and brought peace and order to the oceans. It also provided for an equitable relationship among States in their use of the ocean and has been a major contribution to international peace and security.

The Convention has stood the test of time and remains relevant to address current challenges. As the ‘constitution for the oceans’, this treaty is indeed a striking illustration of the collective contribution of the international community to the vision of a more fair and equal society.

One of the most significant aspects envisaged in the Convention is the establishment of the International Seabed Authority to control and administer the seabed and its mineral resources beyond the limits of national jurisdiction for the benefit of mankind as whole.

The members of the Authority have been working together to build a solid institutional architecture and an ever-growing regulatory framework for the oversight of the activities in the Area, and which currently constitutes the most comprehensive and equitable regime to govern the access to and utilization of the mineral resources and the protection of the marine environment in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Against this background four key elements relating to the work of the Authority could be highlighted.

Continuity in the work of the Authority

First. The work of the Authority has continued relentlessly notwithstanding the difficult context of the pandemic situation. The Legal and Technical Commission met remotely during the month of July and managed to complete its agenda. The Commission made progress in its work on draft standards and

guidelines for deep seabed mining operations. A set draft standards and guidelines were subsequently released for stakeholder consultation. The Commission continues to work on additional draft standards and guidelines, and these will be issued for consultation when ready. The Finance Committee also met remotely on several occasions between May and October and successfully completed its agenda, including by recommending a budget for the biennium 2020-2021 to the Assembly and the Council.

The Assembly and Council also took the necessary measures to resume their work and open the second part of the twenty-sixth session. For this, we drew heavily on the processes adopted by the General Assembly and the Meeting of States Parties of the Convention, including by resorting to the tool of advancing the work by silence procedure in view of the current extraordinary circumstances. In this context, Ambassador Denys Wibaux (France) was duly elected President of the Assembly for the twenty-sixth session and Rear-Admiral (retd.) Md. Khursed Alam (Bangladesh) was elected as President of the Council.

The Assembly and the Council are steadily progressing in completing their respective programme of work for the remainder of 2020 centered around time-sensitive agenda items that need to be disposed of before the end of the year. All other agenda items have been postponed to 2021. In the case of the Council, this includes continued work on the draft exploitation regulations and the issue of the next election of the Legal and Technical Commission.

Progress in the development of the draft exploitation regulations

Second, and as it has been mentioned in the past few sessions of the General Assembly, the priority task of the Authority as identified by the Council is to develop regulations for exploitation of marine minerals in the Area.

Before the pandemic situation unfolded across many parts of the world, the Council was able to meet earlier in the year during the first part of the twenty-sixth session. In that context, the Council continued its consideration of the draft regulations on exploitation as recommended by the Legal and Technical Commission. The draft, which has been developed over several years, has already undergone many rounds of global stakeholder consultations. The Council also adopted a decision concerning working methods to advance discussions on the draft regulations, including the establishment of three informal working groups to address some of the issues identified as requiring further in-depth discussions, namely: protection and preservation of the marine environment; inspection, compliance and enforcement; and institutional matters. As noted before in this statement, the work by the Council on the draft regulations has been suspended until 2021.

Development of Regional Environmental Management Plans

Third. I am pleased to draw the attention of the General Assembly to important progress in the implementation of the strategy to develop additional regional environmental management plans (also known as REMPs). The process of development of REMPs, which the Council had decided to undertake under the auspices of the Authority, serves as a tangible expression of the Authority's commitment to the protection of marine environment of the Area. It is also another example of the application of the precautionary approach by the Authority in fulfilling its mandate under the Convention.

The secretariat has launched an ambitious programme of online expert workshops to be completed by the end of the year. In this connection, an online workshop on the development of a regional environmental management plan in the North-west Pacific, took place recently from 26 October to 6 November 2020. Likewise, the online workshop on the development of a regional environmental management plan for the Area of the Northern Mid-Atlantic Ridge with a focus on polymetallic sulphides deposits, took place from 23 November to 4 December 2020. The Government of India has communicated its plan to host a workshop on the development of a regional environmental management plan for the Indian Ocean triple junction ridge and nodule bearing province in 2021.

The outcomes of these expert workshops will not only contribute to create a significant body of new scientific work that will help to protect the marine environment, but they will also provide a robust scientific and technical basis for the work of the Legal and Technical Commission in preparing their recommendations on the development of REMPs for the consideration by the Council.

Action plan of the Authority in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

And fourth. In light of its mandate on marine scientific research under the Convention, the Authority has developed an action plan to formalize and organize its contribution to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. Given that the UN Decade will formally begin in 2021, the adoption of the action plan has been identified by the Assembly as one of the priority matters that require a decision before the end of the year. We also take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to the Government of Argentina, which is also chairing the IOC-UNESCO, for acting as the champion for the Authority's Action Plan. We look forward to working with Argentina and other willing partners, including IOC-UNESCO in the implementation of the Action Plan.

Mr/Madame President,

To conclude. As the Secretary-General wishes to reaffirm his commitment to ensure that the provisions of the Convention are implemented on the basis of equity and for the benefit of all humanity, and therefore, extends his express his sincere appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and the Division for the Law of the Sea for their cooperation and for the support extended to the Authority.
