



Updates and overview of recent progress in the work of ISA

Kingston, Jamaica

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VIDEO MESSAGE

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2020 has undoubtedly been a year of great challenges for everybody. The Authority has not been exempted from those challenges, with many of our programmes and activities severely impacted since the Council last met in March.

The situation we have faced has indeed been a huge test of the resilience of the organization and of its staff.

I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the dedication and commitment of all the staff, who have risen to the challenge of keeping the work of the Authority moving forward with their usual spirit of passion and creativity.

In fact, despite the postponement of the twenty-sixth session – first in July, and then again in October – we have made remarkable progress in our work.

The Legal and Technical Commission, meeting remotely, managed to complete its agenda and has even issued the first three sets of draft standards and guidelines for deep sea mining operations for stakeholder consultation. I must express my sincere appreciation to all the members of the Commission, who gave substantially of their time, often in very difficult circumstances, early in the morning or late at night, for the best part of a month at the peak of the global pandemic.

On the development of the Mining Code, important background work has been done to prepare for when it is possible for us to meet again physically. This includes major work on the financial and economic model for seabed mining, as well as a study in relation to the proposed environmental compensation fund. The results of this work will be introduced in the coming weeks through a webinar, so that stakeholders are fully informed and well prepared for the time when we are able to meet and continue face to face negotiations.

In terms of marine science and the protection of the marine environment, we launched in September an ambitious programme of online workshops between now and the end of the year to advance work on the development of regional environmental management plans and related matters, including standardization for taxonomic identification as well as data collection and analysis. The reaction to these workshops has been overwhelmingly positive, with widespread participation from leading scientists worldwide as well as a broad range of member States.

In presenting this ambitious programme, we have not only created a significant body of new scientific work that will help to protect the marine environment, but we have also created a new model for transparent and inclusive scientific collaboration that will be used in future to supplement traditional approaches.

We could not have done this alone, and I want to express my appreciation to the Legal and Technical Commission members as well as many institutions and governments that have supported the Authority in this process, including: the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea, the National Marine Biodiversity Institute of Korea (MABIK), the Korea Institute of Ocean Science and Technology (KIOST), the European Union, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation, the All-Russia Scientific Research Institute for Geology and Mineral Resources of the Ocean (VNIIOkeangeologia), the China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association (COMRA), and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Important progress has also been made in the development of a draft Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy which will be soon released for public consultations.

The Authority has also been an active participant in important international initiatives. These include the work of the United Nations Global Compact and the launch of its Ocean Stewardship 2030 report, the implementation of the road-map for accelerated implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs as well as participating in the process of designing the UN Decade for Ocean Science, which launches in 2021.

I am particularly pleased that Argentina has announced its willingness to act as a champion for the Authority's own Action Plan for Marine Scientific Research in support of the UN Decade and that a draft resolution on this matter is now before the ISA Assembly for adoption in 2020. This will ensure that the Authority's specific mandate with respect to marine scientific research in the Area is recognized and help to mobilize resources to ensure that nobody is left behind in the implementation of the Decade.

Turning to the internal administration of the Authority, the Finance Committee has also completed its work, meeting in similar circumstances to the Legal and Technical Commission. Its report and recommendations are available on the website. Once again, I am grateful to all the members of the Committee for their personal commitment and dedication in these difficult circumstances.

Of course, we had been hoping to meet in Kingston in October. Given ongoing travel restrictions globally, this proved not to be feasible. With the support and cooperation of member States, we have nevertheless been able to formally convene the meetings of the Council and Assembly using the silence procedure. Both the Council and the Assembly are therefore now in session.

As we enter the last quarter of the year, we need now to refocus our energy on recovering from the delays of the past several months and on building back even stronger than before.

We hope that circumstances will allow for a physical meeting in 2020, albeit in a much-reduced format but we must also prepare ourselves for the eventuality that we cannot meet in 2020 and be ready to apply innovative solutions to the most pressing issues. It is essential, for example, to elect the incoming members of the Council so that they can fulfil their tasks for 2021. This is a matter that has always been dealt with by consensus, as required by the Convention and the 1994 Agreement, and there should be no reason why this cannot be done in 2020. I urge member States to continue informal consultations on this matter with a view to coming to a timely consensus.

It is equally essential for the Authority to adopt a budget, based on the recommendation of the Finance Committee. Without a budget, the Authority will be unable to function and all activities will cease. I look forward to the budget progressing smoothly through the Council and the Assembly and urge all members to take a pragmatic and flexible approach in the interests of the Authority.

I also look forward to the many upcoming activities of the Authority in the next few weeks, including a webinar to introduce the draft Action Plan in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science and a webinar to introduce the draft decision before the Assembly on capacity development. I hope that as many of you as possible will participate in these events and I look forward to seeing you there.

Thank you very much.
