



Thirty-First Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

Agenda item 9: 'Information reported by the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority.'

Kingston, Jamaica

21 June 2021

Statement by Mr. Michael W. Lodge,
Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

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Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

Thank you for this annual opportunity to present information about the work of the Authority to the Meeting of States Parties to the Convention.

Let me begin by offering my congratulations to you Mr. President on your election as President of the thirty-first Meeting of States Parties. It is a great pleasure to see you back in the law of the sea community and I look forward to your guidance during your Presidency.

Let me also congratulate Mr. Vladimir Jares on your well-served appointment as Director of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea. I have had the pleasure of working with you for almost 30 years now and I am delighted that the Division is in such safe hands.

Most of all, I wish to extend my congratulations and appreciation to the States Parties for your constant support for the Authority and its work over the past year and a half.

Thanks to your support, and with the guidance of the Presidencies of the Assembly and Council, supported by their respective bureaux, we have managed to deal effectively with the essential business of the Authority despite the lack of face-to-face meetings since February 2020. This included adopting critical decisions, adopting a budget for the financial period 2021-2022, electing by consensus one-half of the membership of the Council, electing the Secretary-General, and adopting a decision to extend the terms of office of the members of the Legal and Technical Commission by one year, to December 2022. I know that some of these decisions were not easy and required a spirit of consensus and forbearance on the part of some members. Nevertheless, these decisions were critical to ensure business continuity for the Authority and in the long run will help us to recommence our work more effectively and efficiently.

It is our aim to convene face-to-face meetings of the Assembly and Council later in 2021 and I will keep States Parties fully informed on the possible dates and modalities for these meetings.

Appreciation must also be extended to the members of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee. Regardless of the current constraints, these bodies have never stopped work and have carried out all their business remotely, at great personal cost in terms of time and energy.

In 2020, the Legal and Technical Commission was able to review and recommend approval of a new plan of work for exploration sponsored by Jamaica. This was subsequently approved by the Council, and I was able to sign a contract with Blue Minerals Jamaica earlier this year. I extend warmest congratulations to Jamaica on this important achievement, which makes Jamaica the sixth Small Island Developing State to become a sponsor of activities in the Area and underlines once again the importance of the Convention and the Part XI regime to equity in the sustainable development of ocean resources.

This year, the Commission started a six-week programme of virtual meetings in March. Its first priority was to review seven requests for extension of exploration contracts. This was completed and now the Commission will review the annual reports submitted by contractors.

The Commission has also drafted and issued for public consultation all of the phase one standards and guidelines for deep-sea mineral exploitation. I would like to take this opportunity to remind States Parties that the consultation period remains open to 3 July 2021. I encourage all States Parties to submit comments so that we can continue to develop the Mining Code in the most open and transparent way possible.

The Finance Committee has also remained in session throughout 2020 and 2021 and has been able to ensure continuity in the essential management of the Authority's financial affairs. It has also been able to continue its important work on the issue of equitable sharing of financial and other economic benefits from activities in the Area.

In terms of the financial situation of the Authority, I am pleased to report that as of the end of May 2021, 65 per cent of assessed contributions to the budget of the Authority for the year of 2021 have been paid. This leaves 35 per cent of assessed contributions outstanding and I urge States concerned to pay their contributions as soon as possible.

The total amount of arrears for prior periods, from 1998-2020 is \$993,251. More worrying is the fact that 56 States are in arrears of contributions for more than two years and, indeed, eight States have never paid any contributions whatsoever since becoming parties to the Convention. This means that 33 per cent of the membership of the Authority is potentially disqualified from the exercise of voting rights.

We have circulated more detailed information about the status of arrears, and I wish to once again urge all States parties to pay their outstanding contributions without delay.

Mr. President,

I would like to draw the attention of States Parties to two important decisions that were adopted by the Assembly in December 2020.

The first is the Authority's Action Plan in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

The promotion and encouragement of marine scientific research in the Area lies at the core of the Authority's mandate under the Convention and this Action Plan has been developed in close collaboration with IOC-UNESCO to reflect fully the Authority's unique mandate. At the heart of the Action Plan are six strategic research priorities around which the Authority will mobilize its actions.

I am tremendously grateful to Argentina for stepping forward to act as champion for the Action Plan and look forward to working closely with Argentina, IOC-UNESCO and other willing partners to implement the Plan, with an emphasis on promoting dissemination, exchange and sharing of scientific data and deep-sea research outputs and increasing deep-sea literacy.

In fact, important progress has already been made. In May 2021, the Authority has officially joined the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE) network to serve as a node for the Ocean Biodiversity Information System (OBIS) of IOC-UNESCO – the first intergovernmental organization to do so.

The Authority has also established a strategic partnership with the International Hydrographic Organization with a view to supporting the Seabed 2030 initiative aimed at expanding and enhancing mapping of the seafloor. We are working closely with IHO and our contractors to develop the necessary protocols to standardize and exchange high resolution bathymetric data collected by contractors with IHO as a contribution towards the Seabed 2030 project. I am pleased to inform you that recently the first datasets under this programme were transferred to IHO.

Significant progress has also been made to establish collaborative initiatives with States parties, contractors, and other stakeholders to advance research related to the environmental effects of activities in the Area. Of particular interest is recent progress made on standardizing and innovating methodologies for deep-sea biodiversity assessment, including taxonomic identification and description.

The second decision relates to the decision to implement a programmatic approach to capacity development. Since the adoption of that decision, and acting on the recommendation of the Assembly, 39 States parties have already nominated National Focal Points for Capacity Development and a first meeting of the group of national focal points has been organized. I encourage all States parties to nominate their national focal points.

The key role for these national focal points is to support the secretariat in developing a dedicated strategy for capacity development and to help identify a network of institutions that could contribute to the implementation of that strategy.

Another flagship initiative is the launch of the Women in Deep-Sea Research (WIDSR) project. This project builds on the Voluntary Commitment registered by the Authority at the 2017 UN Ocean Conference and aims to address the critical barriers preventing women's empowerment and leadership in deep-sea research related disciplines and activities. The project has a particular focus on women scientists from Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing States and Small Island Developing States. The Authority is pleased to partner with the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing States and Small Islands Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) as well as States parties, international and regional organizations, research and regulatory agencies, contractors and non-governmental organizations.

The first initiative under this project will be a gender-mapping analysis and identification of critical barriers to the participation of women from LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS in deep-sea related research disciplines and activities and access to leadership positions. I count on the support of all States parties to this important initiative and welcome any contributions.

Mr. President,

In the time available it is impossible to cover all aspects of the work of the Authority. There are many critical and difficult issues ahead, including the need for States parties to agree on the composition of the Legal and Technical Commission prior to the next election, as well as pending recommendations in relation to the Enterprise and the establishment of the Economic Planning Commission.

I invite States parties to regularly check the website of the Authority for updates and announcements from the secretariat. As always, all relevant documentation is being posted on the website as soon as it is available.

I would also like to mention how pleased I was to see many delegates participate in our inaugural online 'Deep DiplomaSea' initiative earlier this year. In response to demand, we will be running a second edition of this webinar on 8 July and I encourage those of you who are interested to sign up.

To conclude, I would like to express my belated appreciation to States parties for their continued trust and support in re-electing me as Secretary-General for a second term on 3 December 2020. I pledge to continue to work in the best interests of all States parties and with utmost fidelity to the Convention and the 1994 Agreement.

I would like, in this regard, to reiterate the importance of the role played by the Convention and its institutions to ensure international cooperation, peace, security and a legal order for the seas and oceans, promoting the equitable uses of their resources, and the protection and preservation of the marine environment.

The Convention and its three institutions, together with the 1994 Agreement, provide the foundation of and play a central role in the ocean governance architecture. That is why, it is in the interests of the whole of the international community that their integrity is protected and not undermined.

For the Authority, as it moves towards the development of a regulatory framework for the sustainable exploitation of the seabed minerals of the Area for the benefit of all humanity, and as it progresses in the implementation of measures to protect the marine environment, further improves scientific knowledge of the ocean floor and contributes to the implementation of internationally endorsed goals and targets, the continuous and robust support and commitment of all States parties will be critical.
