



**STATEMENT OF
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OF THE
INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY**

**AGENDA ITEM 52: OCEANS AND THE
LAW OF THE SEA**

**58th SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

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Mr. President,

I am pleased to make this statement on the work of the International Seabed Authority and to comment on some current issues relating to the oceans and the law of the sea.

I wish to welcome the new States Parties to the Convention, especially Canada, whose delegation was an active participant in the negotiations for the Convention and look forward to other States becoming Parties, in particular the United States of America, which is currently considering accession.

Once again we have before us a very informative report of the Secretary-General. I would like to acknowledge the work of the DOALOS Secretariat and other agencies and bodies that contributed to the report and compliment the Director of the Division, Mrs. Annick de Marffy for her leadership.

Mr. President,

The resolutions under item 52 – Oceans and the Law of the Sea, are very comprehensive and I compliment those who worked so hard to put them together.

I note with satisfaction that throughout these resolutions there are references to the needs and interests of developing countries. It is important that these needs are given practical meaning so that developing countries can see some tangible benefits from the implementation of the Convention. These needs and interests were identified, based on responses of States, in a study prepared by the Secretary-General which is contained in document A/45/712. It would be useful to refer back to this study and the important recommendations it contains to see how they can be given practical effect.

Mr. President,

I wish to express the appreciation of the International Seabed Authority to the delegations which have expressed their support for the work of the Authority. It is encouraging that there continues to be such a high level of interest in the Authority's work. I believe this to be a positive indication of the commitment of member States to see the Authority fulfil its responsibilities in accordance with the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1994 Agreement for the Implementation of Part XI of the Convention.

I hope that as many Member States as possible will be able to attend the next session of the Authority, which will take place from 24 May to 4 June 2004 preceded by an additional week of meeting of the Legal and Technical Commission. The next session will mark another milestone in the life of the

Convention, as it will be the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Authority. In light of the experience gained since the Authority began to function as an autonomous body, and taking into account the continuous developments in science and technology that have taken place with respect to the deep ocean, I had indicated to the Assembly of the Authority that I would present at its tenth session a comprehensive three-year plan, which would include proposals for streamlining and restructuring the secretariat in such a manner as to reflect the more technical emphasis in the work of the Authority. I hope that a rigorous and comprehensive multi-year work programme would be of benefit to all Member States and that it would assist the Assembly of the Authority to prioritize activities and provide a mechanism to measure performance against clearly stated objectives.

Mr. President,

I would like to take this opportunity to remind States of the decision taken by the Authority to establish a trust fund to assist in the participation of developing country members of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee in the work of these bodies. I urge Member States to consider making contributions to the trust fund.

One important outstanding organizational matter that has been of concern to Member States of the Authority for several years is the Supplementary Agreement between the Authority and its host country concerning the contributions towards the maintenance cost of the headquarters premises of the Authority. At the ninth session of the Authority, held in Kingston in July 2003, Member States had urged me to work together with the Government of Jamaica to conclude a Supplementary Agreement as soon as possible. I am very pleased to be able to report to the General Assembly that, with the cooperation of our present colleagues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Government of Jamaica, who took their obligations as a host country seriously, it has finally been possible to conclude the agreement. The conclusion of this Supplementary Agreement effectively completes the outstanding work with respect to the organizational phase of the Authority's existence.

Mr. President,

The focus of the Authority's work is now very much on substantive and technical matters. The substantive work programme of the Authority is largely determined by the provisions of the Convention and the Agreement, and in particular section 1, paragraph 5, of the annex to the Agreement, which lists the items that the Authority is to concentrate on between the entry into force of the Convention and the approval of the first plan of work for exploitation.

Mr. President,

Perhaps the most important way in which the Authority can contribute to the overall scheme for ocean governance set out in the Convention and the Agreement is as a repository of scientific data and information on the deep seabed, and as a catalyst for marine scientific research in the international area.

Indeed, one of the basic responsibilities of the Authority under the Convention is to promote and encourage marine scientific research in the Area and to disseminate the results of that research. The most immediate and practical way in which the Authority has begun to implement its responsibilities is through a programme of technical workshops. These workshops have brought together internationally-recognized scientists, experts, researchers, contractors, representatives of the offshore mining industry and member States. They have covered issues such as the assessment of environmental impacts from deep sea exploration, mining technology, the status of resources, standardization of techniques for data collection and prospects for international collaboration in deep sea environmental research. As a direct result of these workshops, the Authority has developed environmental guidelines for deep sea nodule exploration and is in the process of elaborating international guidelines for standardization of data from deep sea research as well as a geologic model of the ocean floor in the Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone of the Pacific. Only last week I met in New York with the representatives of Contractors and I feel very encouraged by their commitment to cooperate actively in the development of the geologic model.

In addition, the Authority is a partner, along with scientists and institutions from the United States, France, Korea, the United Kingdom and Japan in a major international research project to study large-scale patterns of species diversity and gene flow in the deep Pacific, with a view to better predicting and managing the impacts of deep seabed mining. This project, which is funded substantially by the J.M. Kaplan Fund, will use state-of-the-art molecular and standardized morphological taxonomy to evaluate levels of species overlap and rates of gene flow across the nodule province for key components of the polychaetes, nematodes and foraminifera. Within the framework of this project, it is also proposed to train scientists from developing countries in the use of molecular techniques for the study of biodiversity. The results of the project, including specific recommendations on minimizing risks to biodiversity resulting from seabed mining, will be disseminated through the Authority to the international community.

Mr. President

In my statement to this Assembly last year, I mentioned that scientific research into the oceans, including the ocean bottoms, is perhaps the most

significant of all ocean activities, because it relates directly to improvement in all uses of the ocean and also to the invention of new uses.

It is particularly encouraging, therefore, to note the recommendation, contained in paragraph 68 of draft resolution A/58/L.19 that the next meeting of the Consultative Process should organize its discussions around the question of the conservation and management of the biological diversity of the seabed in areas beyond national jurisdiction. This is a matter of particular concern to the Authority because it is becoming increasingly obvious that the areas of greatest biological diversity in the deep ocean are also the areas where the highest concentrations of minerals are found. Since it is the responsibility of the Authority, under article 145 of the Convention, to ensure that measures are taken to protect the flora and fauna of the marine environment from harmful effects that may arise from activities in the Area, it is equally obvious that evaluation of the ecology of the deep ocean is a very important aspect of the Authority's work.

Mr. President,

Every time a scientist makes some completely unexpected discovery in the oceans it is a reminder of how little we know about this critical environment. It must by now be clear to us all that long-term epistemic management of the deep ocean environment, or biosphere – which should be the goal to which we aspire – will require a thorough knowledge and catalogue of the ocean's resources, both living and non-living. Not only must this be done, but the results of such study must be shared among all nations, developed and developing, coastal and land-locked, on an equitable basis. We cannot protect, conserve or otherwise sustainably manage the marine ecosystem with little or no knowledge of the marine environment.

The problem is that no single nation has the financial, technological and intellectual capacity to undertake a global programme of scientific research of the magnitude that is required. To be truly effective, international collaboration on a vast scale is required, involving scientists, researchers, organizations and governments from around the world. We are beginning to see such programmes take shape. The Authority's own modest efforts to develop a better understanding of the deep ocean environment are based on broad cooperation between prospective miners, research institutions and individual scientists. On a more ambitious scale, the Census of Marine Life is a programme of international research involving more than 60 institutions from 15 countries for assessing and explaining the diversity, distribution and abundance of marine organisms throughout the world's oceans. Likewise, the Integrated Ocean Drilling Programme involving scientists from some 23 countries is designed to study geological and geophysical aspects of the seabed. Many other cooperative programmes, of various levels of complexity and formality, are also taking place.

But it is my belief that much more could be done to promote, sustain and manage an effective international programme of ocean exploration. It seems to me that this is an area in which the General Assembly, as the supreme political body of the United Nations system, with global competence for ocean governance, could take a lead and declare its support for enhanced efforts in the research and exploration of the oceans.

In this regard, rather than act as a vehicle for bureaucratic coordination, the General Assembly should take the initiative to identify areas of study of broad international interest, such as, for example, deep ocean biodiversity, the sub sea biosphere, seamounts, and marine biotechnology and promote collaborative research among scientists institutions and governments of all nations. By galvanizing international opinion and fostering the political commitment to contribute to such programmes we would hope to drastically alter the existing situation where the world spends tens of billions of dollars on research into outer space and only a very small fraction of that amount on understanding the ocean which plays such a vital role in sustaining human life on planet earth. More importantly, since economic development is directly linked to developments in science and technology, it is only in this way that we will collectively begin to give effect to the ideal expressed in the preamble of the Convention of a "just and equitable international economic order that which takes into account the interests of mankind as a whole and, in particular, the special needs and interests of developing countries."

Mr. President,

I hope we will have an opportunity during the informal consultations on the Law of the Sea next year to give consideration to a General Assembly declaration in order to give a new impetus to ocean exploration as a major goal for humankind for the twenty first century.
