

Statement by Nii Allotey Odunton,
Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority,
Welcoming Participants to the workshop.

Honourable Minister,

I would like to thank, through you, the Government of Fiji for receiving us here and for the warm welcome that it conveyed to us. I particularly wish to thank your cabinet colleagues for the decision to provide all that we need for this workshop that I am sure will meet its usual high standards.

May I take this opportunity to recognize the contribution of the South Pacific Applied Geosciences Commission (SOPAC) for its cooperation in organizing this workshop. I wish to recognize the Director of SOPAC, Dr Russell Howorth who replaced Isikeli Mataitoga as a member of the International Seabed Authority's Legal and Technical Commission on his recent election as a member of the LTC for a five-year term from 2012-2016. His participation in the Commission's work following his election at the recently concluded seventeenth session was appreciated by his colleagues and certainly by the staff of the Authority. On behalf of the Authority, I also wish to thank Dr Howorth and his team from SOPAC for making the local preparations for this workshop.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, this is the 13th workshop held by the Authority and the second that we have held here in Fiji. For those of you who have worked with us before, we have appreciated your involvement in our work over the years and it is good to see you again. For those of you new to the work of the Authority, I hope that this is the beginning of a fruitful relationship. The Authority's workshops are essential to its work as they provide the necessary background information on the subject matter under consideration, which, among other things, provides its organs with the technical and scientific basis for the formulation of rules, regulations, procedures and recommendations for the conduct of activities in the Area. They are also useful for participants as they provide them with a forum for the exchange of information and ideas.

The International Seabed Authority was established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Up until the beginning of this year, 8 contracts for the exploration for polymetallic nodules had been issued by the Authority. This year alone, 4 more contracts have been issued, 2 for polymetallic nodules and 2 for polymetallic sulphides, hopefully the first of many. It is especially encouraging that the 2 new contracts for polymetallic nodules come from organisations within this region, highlighting the opportunities for small island Pacific states to participate in the exploration and possible further exploitation for marine minerals beyond national jurisdiction.

We are entering a new stage in the development of marine minerals and consequently in the work of the International Seabed Authority. On the demand side, metals such as copper, nickel, manganese and cobalt are rising steadily while the environmental requirements for land-based mining are rising concomitantly as well. With regard to environmental regulation for seabed mining, the Authority has

taken steps to augment the international community's knowledge base in order to facilitate adequate environmental protection from mining. These steps include standardizing data and data collection methods in order to develop robust databases to facilitate decision-making. On the development of appropriate technologies, recent advances in submersible technologies suggest that operating depths of over 7,000 metres will soon be surpassed. The number of requests to the Commission on the Outer Limits of the Continental Shelf to demarcate the limits of many coastal states bodes well for those states that wish to exploit the mineral resources in this geographic area. It is becoming clear that exploitation of marine mineral resources is becoming increasingly likely and with this increase in activity, the potential impacts on the marine environment need to be addressed, particularly as concerns environmental impact assessments. The Authority will begin work on an exploitation code next year and this code is expected to include the requirement for Environmental Impact Assessment which is why we are holding this meeting.

As you will have seen from the Agenda, the aims of this workshop are:

1. To increase awareness of the nature of the mineral resources in marine areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction ("the Area"), and on the outer continental shelf, and the measures taken by the International Seabed Authority with regard to the protection of the marine environment from the harmful effects of deep seabed mining and the applicability of such measures to the development of marine minerals within national jurisdiction.
2. To formulate preliminary recommendations for environmental impact assessments (EIA) of seabed mining both within and beyond national jurisdiction.

I want to thank you for participating in this workshop and for those making presentations, to acknowledge with appreciation the readiness with which you agreed to make them and to contribute to the proceedings. I look forward to productive discussions during the next few days and I will now pass the microphone to Adam Cook, the Authority's scientific affairs officer responsible for marine biology, who with Akuila Tawake of SOPAC are the facilitators for the workshop and who will provide more information on the structure of the workshop and what the Authority would like to achieve from it.

Thank you very much.

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