

# WOMEN IN THE LAW OF THE SEA CONFERENCE

## Opening Remarks by Ambassador Burhan Gafoor

26 September 2022

---

I would like to begin by welcoming all of you to the Permanent Mission of Singapore to the United Nations.

2 For small States like Singapore, the rule of law at the international level is of existential importance. Amongst other things, it is critical for our vital interests like sovereignty and sustainable development. Singapore is therefore strongly supportive of initiatives that seek to promote respect for international law, such as this conference. I wish to share three points as to why this conference is particularly important and special, and why Singapore is honoured and privileged to be its host for its first day.

3 First, this conference is held in celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). UNCLOS is no ordinary treaty. It is the constitution for the oceans. It remains, to this day, one of the United Nations' greatest achievements in relation to the codification and progressive development of international law. Its adoption in 1982 was a significant step towards the establishment of a new legal order for the oceans, which was ultimately achieved with its entry into force in 1994. Singapore is proud of our heritage of leadership in and contributions to the development of UNCLOS—in particular, Ambassador Tommy Koh's service as President of the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea from 1981 until its conclusion, during which UNCLOS was adopted.

4 Second, this conference highlights and celebrates the contributions of women to the law of the sea as reflected in UNCLOS. The importance of women to the rule of law in the ocean cannot be underestimated, as demonstrated by the strong line-up of speakers for this conference. Singapore is strongly committed to the advancement of women and gender equality, and it is encouraging that various Singapore women experts in the law of the sea have made their mark in prominent and impactful ways. The BBNJ Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) for the elaboration of a new international legally binding instrument under UNCLOS, for instance, is being presided over by a Singaporean woman—our Ambassador for Oceans and Law of the Seas Issues, Rena Lee. The treaty that is being negotiated in the BBNJ IGC will contribute significantly to the conservation and the sustainable use of our global commons.

5           Third, this is an event of the ISA, which has been a key pillar of the legal order for the ocean under UNCLOS. Since its establishment, the ISA has faithfully discharged its mandate of organizing and controlling all mineral resources-related activities in the Area. In doing so, it has materially contributed to the realisation of Ambassador Arvid Pardo's vision of the Area and its resources being the common heritage of mankind and the international community's efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Singapore, a member of the ISA Council, has actively supported the ISA and will continue to contribute to its work, in particular with respect to the protection of the marine environment from harmful effects that may arise from deep-seabed activities.

6           Finally, as this Conference provides an opportunity for stocktaking on UNCLOS's contributions, I wish to add that UNCLOS has provided the foundation for the survival and development of small island nations like Singapore, whose people and economy are intertwined with the ocean. Amongst other things, we depend on UNCLOS's comprehensive rules for the establishment of maritime entitlements, the balance it struck between coastal State rights and navigational rights and freedoms, and its rules on the protection and preservation of the marine environment.

7           Singapore's position is, and always will be, that UNCLOS, as reaffirmed annually by the General Assembly, sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. We are committed to its full and effective implementation, and would note in this regard that it was adopted as a package and that there should therefore be no selectivity in its application. New challenges in the ocean have emerged since UNCLOS was adopted 40 years ago. However, its rules while firm have sufficient flexibility and scope for all new challenges to be addressed.

8           I wish all of you success and an enriching time ahead. Thank you.