

International Seabed Authority, Assembly, Twenty-sixth session, Agenda item 9
“Annual report of the Secretary-General: Implementing a programmatic approach to capacity development”

Statement by Austria
Ambassador Helmut Tuerk

Mr. President,

on behalf of the Austrian delegation to the 26th session of the Assembly of the ISA let me first of all congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on the election, wishing you a most successful outcome of the deliberations at the present session. Thus far, you have, with the great support by the Secretary-General and his team, already been steering the decision-making process of the Assembly in a remarkably efficient manner during a unique and extremely difficult time in the life of the Authority.

It should also be noted that the spirit of accommodation and willingness to compromise consistently displayed by the members of the ISA is substantially contributing to the advancement of our work with the goal of also successfully concluding the remaining items on the agenda as soon as circumstances will permit. The Austrian delegation is thus also looking forward to the consideration of the annual report of the Secretary-General under Article 166, paragraph 4, of the Convention at the next possible opportunity.

Mr. President,

in line with your indication on the current work of the Assembly, I will limit my remarks to a few comments on the report of the Secretary-General on implementing a programmatic approach to capacity development, contained in document ISBA/26/A/7, which is based on a comprehensive review of all capacity-building programmes and initiatives implemented by the Authority between 1994 and 2019.

Let me recall that Austria regards the adoption in 2018 of the strategic plan of the Authority for the period 2019 – 2023 as a particularly important and overdue step as it provides clear goals and guidance for its ongoing work. The adoption of the strategic plan may well be

considered a major result of the first review process under Article 154 of the Convention, successfully concluded in 2017.

Let us also bear in mind that the next review process is already due in 2022 which will once again provide the Members of the Authority with the opportunity to take stock of its achievements and to consider the directions of its future work.

The Austrian delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his thorough and comprehensive report on capacity development, submitted under the present agenda item of which we have taken note with great interest. The same holds true of the summary report on the outcomes of the workshop on capacity development, resources and needs assessment, held in Kingston in February of this year, contained in document ISBA/276/A/12. This workshop has obviously provided a highly valuable input for the report of the Secretary-General.

Let me now briefly address some of the items dealt with in that report. It is particularly noteworthy that since 1994 more than 400 individuals from all geographic regions have benefited from the capacity building programmes and initiatives implemented by the Authority.

We share the view expressed in the report that, in future, it is particularly important that especially the specific needs of least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States are met. In this context let me point out a small error in paragraph 7 of the report where it should obviously read “least developed countries” instead of “least developing countries”.

It is also a good sign that from 1994 to 2019 more than 140 individuals were trained under the contractor training programme of the Authority and that between 2013 and 2019 25 % of participants were from small island developing States, landlocked developing countries and least developed countries. The welcome fact that 45 % of the trainees during that period were women is a clear indication that the Authority is slowly moving towards gender parity.

The Secretary-General’s report also highlights that the main objectives of the Endowment Fund for Marine Scientific Research in the Area, established by the Assembly in 2006, are to enable the Authority to promote and encourage the conduct of marine scientific research in the Area, including through the development of programmes designed to benefit developing States and technologically less developed States, pursuant to Article 143, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Convention.

While the primary focus in this respect should clearly be on developing countries, the other group of States mentioned in that provision should not be overlooked. We consider that this provision of the Convention is in particular meant to apply to countries which are less advanced in marine science and technology.

The Austrian delegation is pleased to note that grants allocated under the Endowment Fund have allowed, as of June 2020, 145 individuals from 50 countries of all geographic regions, almost one third of them hailing from least developed countries, to benefit from training, research and other activities carried out by various institutions. It is, of course, regrettable that no individual from a landlocked developing country was among them.

The Secretary-General's report also mentions certain challenges faced in the operation of the Fund, which were likewise pointed out by some of the participants of the workshop on capacity development. While not wishing to go into any detail in this respect we wish to express our hope that the shortcomings referred to will be further examined in-depth with the view to devising appropriate remedies.

An excellent way to educate the next generation of law of the sea experts is undoubtedly the granting of internships. As shown in the report, the vast majority of participants in the internship programme, initiated by the Authority in 2014, were women and around one third of the participants came from small island developing States.

It is certainly to be regretted that there were no interns from Africa, landlocked developing countries and least developed countries due to the fact that the costs associated with internships have to be covered by the participants themselves. We therefore appreciate the efforts of the Secretary-General to mobilize additional resources in order to broaden the scope of the programme.

Mr. President,

the Austrian delegation concurs with the conclusions and recommendations set forth in chapter IV of the Secretary-General's report. We welcome, in particular, the fact that the proposed budget for the financial period 2021 -2022 for the first time includes a programme relating to capacity development.

Austria wishes to express its support for the draft decision of the Assembly relating to the implementation of a programmatic approach to capacity development, as the text proposed sets a clear course for future action of the Authority in this field on the basis of the report of the Secretary-General.

Let me only make a small drafting suggestion with respect to the penultimate preambular paragraph of the draft decision. In our view the enumeration of the various groups of developing States listed in that paragraph should be slightly changed. We are fully aware that the present wording is also found in the Secretary-General's report and other documents. It could nevertheless be slightly improved in light of the following considerations: there is one group of developing countries which is defined by economic criteria, that is the least developed countries, while the other groups referred to are based on geographic criteria.

In our view it would therefore seem more logical to insert the reference to landlocked developing countries immediately after or before mentioning the small island developing States. The least developed countries should be placed at the end or at the beginning of the enumeration of the various groups of States. In this context it should also be borne in mind that the Authority is dealing with "the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States".

Thank you, Mr. President