

**Statement of the Kingdom of Tonga, delivered by Ms. Jeanett Vea  
26<sup>th</sup> Session – Assembly of the International Seabed Authority (ISA26)**

**Agenda Item 9: Annual report of the Secretary-General  
ISBA/26/A/2 and ISBA/26/A/2/Add.1**

**13 December 2021  
ISA Headquarters, Kingston, Jamaica**

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**Mr. President,**

I have the honor to represent the Kingdom of Tonga, in person, at the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority in its 26<sup>th</sup> Session, conducted for the first time in hybrid format due to the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic. On that note, I acknowledge with much gratitude the great coordination efforts among your good self, Mr. President, the Secretariat and the Host Country, Jamaica in safely facilitating our attendance in person in such trying times and for the warm hospitality.

**Mr. President,**

The Annual report of the Secretary-General presented under Agenda Item 9 before us is well noted with much appreciation for the hard work and dedication that have gone into the production of this report, contents of which reflect the progress in many aspects of the strategic directions of the organization under the able leadership of the Secretary-General. Tonga acknowledges the great amount of work undertaken by the Secretariat and commends the Secretary-General and the Secretariat for adapting to many challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and for continuing to progress the priorities of the Authority. The hard work has not gone unnoticed and would like to congratulate and warmly welcome the re-election of the Secretary-General in this regard.

**Mr. President,**

Tonga notes new permanent missions to the ISA and welcomes the effort of the Secretary-General to dialogue with Member States in the payment of their contributions. Contributions from Member States are critical for the operation of the Authority and Tonga encourages Member States in timely submitting their contributions.

We appreciate the continued efforts of the Secretary-General and his office to improve the operational performance of the Authority, specifically within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Tonga acknowledges in this regard the preparatory work of the Authority for its transition to that of a regulator.

**Mr. President,**

Tonga welcomes the independent report in relation to the contribution of the ISA to the 2030 Agenda which highlighted 12 of the 17 SDGs were in connection to the Authority. A side-event

was organized on the margins of the 2021 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) to that effect, which was co-sponsored by the Cook Islands and Tonga participated.

We welcome the engagement of the Secretary-General and the Secretariat for the empowerment and leadership of women including through the “Women in deep-sea research project” and the International Gender Champion. We look forward to participating in the upcoming international conference on Women in the Law of the Sea.

**Mr. President,**

We note and appreciate the responsiveness of the Secretariat to specific needs identified by developing Member States of the ISA and we welcome the nomination of 41 National Focal Points, Tonga included. In this connection, Tonga acknowledges with appreciation the vital contributions of Contractors in providing trainings and capacity opportunities to nationals of developing states thereby enhancing the concept of Private Public Partnership. Furthermore, Tonga is pleased to acknowledge that the Tongan contractor, TOML in cooperation with the Secretariat has committed to ensuring that all of its ISA training programs are gender balanced. Tonga is also pleased to note TOML’s ongoing support for the Secretary General’s Award for Excellence in Deep-sea Research and appreciates the addition of an at-sea placement that was most recently offer to the recipient.

Tonga commends the Abyssal Initiative for Blue Growth project implemented by the Authority in partnership with UNDESA and appreciates the ongoing support by them and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. The most recent workshop was co-hosted by the Cook Islands on “Environment management and monitoring requirements related to activities in the Area” and was informative and enhanced capacities for Pacific SIDs. The Secretariat may wish to consider exploring funding for the continuity of the Project.

**Mr. President,**

Tonga participated as one of the panelists in the high-level event to formally launch three (3) sets of publications on the relevance of UNCLOS for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS for which we commend the Secretariat for the efforts made in advancing integration participation by developing states in this regard.

We welcome the zero draft stakeholder engagement strategy and invite the Secretariat to continue its efforts in this sense. The establishment of new “Deep-DiplomaSea” webinar series for personnel of permanent missions will be very useful and is also welcomed.

**Mr. President,**

We appreciate all the great efforts that has been undertaken as presented in the report. Tonga stands ready to support the work of the Authority and relevant bodies specifically in relation to the completion relevant regulatory frameworks in a timely fashion while ensuring due diligence are made where appropriate.

I thank you.