The International Seabed Authority began its eleventh session today with its two top bodies, the Assembly and the Council, electing their presidents and adopting their agendas for the two-week gathering in Kingston, Jamaica, scheduled to conclude on 26 August.

The 148-member Assembly elected Olan Mycklebust of Norway (See biographical note in Press Release SB/11/3) as its president to preside at the eleventh session. Mr. Mycklebust, who is Deputy Director-General of Norway’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was nominated by Finland on behalf of the Western European and Other States Group.

Election of four vice-presidents was deferred to the next meeting of the Assembly on Thursday to allow regional groups to consult. The groups will also take time to consider candidates for appointment to the Credentials Committee.

In other actions, the Assembly elected four new members to fill vacancies on the Finance Committee, replacing their compatriots who had resigned. Oleg Alekseevich Safronov (Russian Federation) replaced Boris G. Idrisov, Alexander Stedtfeld (Germany) replaced Bernd Kreimer, Antonin Paoizek (Czech Republic) replaced Ivo Dreiseitl and Kyaw Moe Tun (Myanmar) will take the place of Aung Htoo. They will serve out the remaining terms through to the end of 2006. All the elections were by acclamations.

Mr. Safronov is the Deputy Director of the Financial Department of the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Mr. Stedtfeld is Deputy Head of the Budget Division in the Federal German Ministry of Economics and Labour; Mr. Paoizek is from the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic, while Mr. Tun is the First Secretary for Economic and Financial Affairs in the Permanent Mission of Myanmar to the United Nations.
The Assembly approved a request for observer status to the Assembly from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, or the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The request was presented in a note by the Secretariat (ISBA/11/A/INF/1) and was added to the agenda. Rule 82, p.1(d) of the Rules of Procedures of the Assembly allows intergovernmental organizations, such as the IUCN, to participate as observers on the invitation of the Assembly. The IUCN is the only conservation organization with observer status before the United Nations General Assembly.

For several decades, the IUCN has been expanding its marine conservation efforts, and recently deep sea and high seas areas have become a particular concern. In its letter to the Secretariat the organization said it sought observer status “in view of the Authority’s growing role and interest in conserving the biodiversity of the seabed beyond national jurisdiction and protecting the marine environment from activities in the Area…”

The Assembly’s agenda items include the annual report of Secretary-General Satya N. Nandan which reviews the Authority’s work since the tenth session and reports and recommendations of the Finance and Credentials Committees.

The 36-member Council of the Authority, also meeting this morning, elected Hee-Kwon Park of the Republic of Korea to serve as Council President for this year’s session. Dr Park is Director General of the Treaties Bureau at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of his country. (A biographical note appears in Press Release SB/11/4). He was nominated by Japan on behalf of the Asian Group.

The Council also elected three new members to serve on the Legal and Technical Committee (LTC). Syamal Kanti Das (India) and Mahmoud Samir Samy (Egypt) will replace their compatriots M. Ravindran and Mohammed M. Gomaa, who resigned during the past year. Michael Wiedicke-Hombach (Germany) fills the vacancy left by the death of Helmut Beiersdorf. The new members will serve the remainder of the terms of their predecessors who were elected in 2002 for five years. Election of the vice-presidents was postponed to allow regional groups more time to propose their candidates.

The major task before the Council this session is the consideration of the rules, regulations and procedures for prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the Area. In his first address to the Council, the President emphasized the need for efficiency and productivity in the discussions in order to achieve an international consensus regarding the regulations.

In other matters, the Council is expected to consider the recommendation of the LTC on the approval of a plan of work for exploration for polymetallic nodules to be submitted by the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources, on behalf of the Federal Republic of Germany at this session, and will also hear reports from that body and the Finance Committee.

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