The Assembly of the International Seabed Authority, acting on the recommendations of the Finance Committee, this morning approved a budget of $11,782,400 to finance the operations of the Authority for the biennium 2007-2008, and the scale of members’ contributions based on a United Nations model.

The Assembly also adopted the report of the Credentials Committee before resuming its discussion on the report of the Secretary General (ISBA/12/A/2) begun last Thursday, August 10.

The Secretary-General’s budget proposal (ISBA/12/A/3/Rev.1-ISBA/12/C/4/Rev.1) provided the Finance Committee with estimates for 2007 of US$5,018,300 for the Authority’s administrative expenses and US$795,300 for conference-servicing requirements. The proposal for 2008 comprised US$5,151,200 for the Authority’s administrative expenses and US$817,600 for conference-servicing requirements. The proposed budget allowed for one two-week session of the Authority in both 2007 and 2008. Conference-servicing costs for the biennium saw an increase of US$12,900, or 15% for the biennium.

According to the annual report of the Secretary-General, as at 31 May 2006, 78 per cent of the value of the contributions to the 2006 budget due had been received from 31 per cent of the membership. Contributions outstanding for prior periods (1998-2005) totalled $358,672. The report also states that as at 31 May 2006, 51 members were in arrears for a period of two years or more.

At this morning’s meeting, Cameroon announced that it had now paid up fully and in advance up to 2007, while Kenya’s representative said that her government was in dialogue with the Secretariat and would be settling its arrears by the end of the week.
The Finance Committee in its recommendations proposed that the scale of assessments for 2007-2008 be based on that used for the regular budget of the United Nations for 2006-2007, with a maximum assessment rate of 22 per cent and the minimum rate 0.01 per cent.

The report on the credentials of representatives to the twelfth session of the International Seabed Authority (ISBA/11/A/9) was presented by Anna Sotaniemi (Finland), Chairman of the Credentials Committee. It noted that 65 members of the Authority were represented at the twelfth session. Other members of the Committee were Australia, China, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Namibia Russian Federation, and the United Republic of Tanzania.

Following the presentation of the Credential Committee’s report, Secretary-General Satya N. Nandan highlighted the issue of poor attendance at the Authority’s sessions, which he said had been a problem for some time. He assured the Assembly that he had taken every opportunity to urge wider participation, including writing letters to members. The matter was also addressed at the General Assembly of the United Nations. He appealed to members to impress upon their colleagues the need to participate in meetings of the Authority. The Convention on the Law of the Sea prescribes half of the 149 members of the Assembly as a quorum.

Jamaica strongly endorsed the Secretary-General’s appeal and made a commitment to work closely with its colleagues within the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) to encourage fuller participation in the Authority’s meetings. Other delegations supported the appeal, while some, including Egypt and Belgium, suggested that the poor attendance might be partially attributable to the timing of the meetings. The representative of Sudan suggested that the Secretary-General should bring the matter up at the General Assembly, and should solicit proposals from members about the timing of sessions. He also proposed that the matter be placed on the agenda of the next session.

Uganda noted that the largest group of absentees were the representatives of land-locked nations and suggested that they should be specifically targeted by the Secretariat as they might not fully realize the relevance of ocean and seabed issues to their countries.

The Secretary-General explained that the timing of sessions was determined by the availability of conference services from New York. The only available time slots fell into the July to August period when the conference services department was not booked for other meetings. The option of using an alternative source for conference services would incur additional costs. The Secretary-General committed to continue trying to book other times in the year which might be more convenient to a greater number of delegations.

**Discussion on Secretary-General’s report**

Much of the comments on the Secretary-General’s report focused on the proposal to create an endowment fund, arrears in contributions to the budget, ratification of the 1994 Agreement, and the substantive work of the Authority.
Delegations, including The Bahamas, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya, and New Zealand endorsed the proposal to establish an endowment fund to assist the participation of developing States in marine scientific research in the Area. Jamaica said that in addition to the Kaplan Project, the endowment fund and the Voluntary Trust Fund were crucial mechanisms that gave practical effect to the implementation of the principle of “the common heritage of mankind.” (The aims of the Kaplan Project are to measure biodiversity, species ranges and gene flow in the Clarion-Clipperton zone).

Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mexico encouraged members to settle arrears in assessed contributions to the budget of the Authority.

Member States were urged to ratify the Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of the Convention, adopted on 28 July 1994 by the United Nations General Assembly. The Secretary-General’s report noted that, as at 30 May 2006, 26 members of the Authority that were parties to the Convention had not yet become parties to the 1994 Agreement. “Universal participation in both instruments is critical to the effective management of the deep seabed resources,” the delegate from Jamaica said. Argentina, Chile and Sudan echoed that appeal. Brazil said it had accelerated the process to ratify the Agreement.

The substantive work of the Authority received high marks in comments from delegations. The report noted that, within the overall framework established by the Convention and the 1994 Agreement, the basic function of the Authority was to manage the mineral resources of the Area. Major tasks included development of the Central Data Repository, development of a geological model for polymetallic nodule deposits in the Clarion-Clipperton fracture Zone, and international collaboration in marine scientific research. New Zealand said it was clear that the Authority was actively pursuing all its major tasks.

The importance of international co-operation in marine scientific research was highlighted by the representative of Cuba who encouraged continued work in that area. Argentina said it fully supported the collaborative work of the Authority on the marine environment so long as such collaboration promoted the common heritage of mankind. Brazil said collaboration in projects such as the Kaplan Project, placed the Authority in “a unique position for contributing to international efforts for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the deep seabed.” Malta supported the plans to upgrade the Authority’s website to render it more accessible and user friendly and therefore more informative.

Delegations also commented on the work of the Authority in conducting workshops and seminars on specific issues related to deep seabed mining. Cuba said it was pleased to have had two of its scientists participate in a workshop prior to the current session. Sudan suggested the creation of a roster of expert in marine science from developing countries who could be invited to participate in workshops. Kenya asked that African States be chosen as a location for workshops to allow members of that group to participate. Mexico thanked the international scientists who have provided substantial support to the work of the Authority.

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Afternoon meeting

The meeting of the Assembly this afternoon to elect members of the Finance Committee was delayed to allow regional groups to confer on the matter. Members of that committee are elected in accordance with section 9 of the annex to the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The President told the Assembly that there was no consensus among regional groups on the Finance Committee election.

When the Assembly meets again at 10 a.m. tomorrow it will consider in the following order: items 7, election to fill vacancies on the Council; item 6, election of members of the Finance Committee; item 8, annual report of the Secretary-General, and the remaining items on the agenda.