JAMAICAN DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PLEDGES GOVERNMENT’S SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY. AUTHORITY’S LIBRARY TO BE NAMED AFTER OUTGOING SECRETARY-GENERAL SATYA N. NANDAN

Dr. Kenneth Baugh, Jamaica’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, this morning reiterated his government’s “unwavering commitment” to the International Seabed Authority and reassured the organization of his country’s continued fulfillment of its obligations as host.

That commitment was reflected in the current refurbishment of the Jamaican Conference Centre (which houses the Authority’s headquarters), Dr. Baugh stated in the traditional statement by the Government of Jamaica, welcoming delegates to the Authority’s annual sessions in Kingston.

Also this morning, the Assembly approved by acclamation, a decision to name the Authority’s library after Mr. Satya N. Nandan, the Authority’s first Secretary-General, who is leaving on 31 December 2008 after serving three consecutive four-year terms. The decision was originally proposed by Indonesia.

The Authority’s library manages its specialized collection of reference and research materials focusing on matters relating to the law of the sea, ocean affairs and deep seabed mining. The library facilities include a reading room with access to the collection for reference purposes only and computer terminals for e-mail and Internet access.

In another action, the Assembly took note of the annual report of the Authority’s Secretary-General, contained in document ISBA/14/A/2.
Jamaica Minister’s statement

In his statement, Dr. Baugh declared that Jamaica valued the constructive working relationship it had enjoyed with the Authority over the years and looked forward to even closer collaboration in confronting the more complex challenges of today’s world.

He recalled that the Authority had, since its establishment, facilitated the crafting of strategies to utilize marine and coastal resources for the benefit of the international community and in an environmentally sustainable way. The Authority’s member States should be mindful of the overarching threat of environmental degradation in their deliberations as countries faced the challenges posed by climate change.

He said the increasing importance of environmental protection in the Authority’s work could not be overstated. The issue of environmental protection was critical to Jamaica as it impinged on the viability of some of its principal industries, such as tourism, fisheries and shipping. Noting the new technologies that were being developed for deep seabed mining, he hoped that the sanctity of the concept of common heritage which underpinned the Authority’s work would be preserved.

Dr. Baugh expressed concern about poor attendance at the annual sessions of the Authority and appealed to its member States to ensure their representation as they strove for global participation in the Authority’s work.

He paid tribute to Secretary-General Satya N. Nandan, under whose leadership, he said, the Authority had recorded significant achievements. The Jamaican Government was satisfied that a solid foundation had now been set in the establishment of an institutional framework for the Authority, including its political structure and organization.

Dr. Baugh urged greater political involvement and participation in the Assembly’s work for the realization of the noble causes embodied in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to firmly secure fundamental principles that must govern inter-State relationship in an increasingly troubled and complex world.

Responding to the address of Deputy Prime Minister Baugh, Secretary-General Nandan thanked him for his part in the Jamaican Government’s quick response to requests for the upgrading of the conference facilities. He said the good relationship that the Foreign Ministry maintained with the International Seabed Authority was vital for the organization’s effectiveness and viability.

The Assembly then continued its consideration of the Secretary-General’s report.

Tonga welcomed the Secretary-General’s report, in particular with respect to the substantive work of the Authority and the recent developments on deep seabed mining. With reference to his country’s application for approval of a plan of work for exploration of the international deep seabed Area, currently under review by the Legal and Technical Commission, he said his government looked forward to the conclusion of the review at the next session. He
also invited the Authority to hold a seminar in Tonga as a useful extension of the scientific workshops in Chennai, India and Madano, Indonesia.

Chile announced that it would host a seminar in February 2009, while Nigeria reported that a workshop scheduled for July 2009 was in an advanced stage of planning.

Lebanon declared its support for the candidacy of Nii Allotey Odunton of Ghana for the next Secretary-General of the Authority. Further support for Mr. Odunton came from France, Guyana and Viet Nam.

Supporting an intervention from Argentina, Senegal proposed that the elections of the new Secretary-General and half of the members of the Council, which are scheduled for Friday, June 6, be moved up to an earlier meeting, as many members might have to leave before the end of the week. The Secretary-General told the Assembly that the necessary adjustments would be made to the programme of work.

With regard to the dates of the Authority’s sessions, Egypt expressed the hope that May would remain the month of choice. On the other hand, Uganda, while acknowledging that this fourteenth session had recorded the highest attendance in a number of years, pointed out that it clashed with the resumed sixth session of a working group of the Assembly of States Parties to the International Criminal Court (Special Working Group on the Crime of Aggression, New York, 2-6 June 2008). He suggested that meetings in February or March would attract even higher levels of participation.

Delegations, including France and Nigeria underscored the importance of the International Seabed Authority’s Endowment Fund for Marine Scientific Research in the Area, which was established by the Assembly in 2006. Urging support for the Fund, Trinidad & Tobago said it was difficult for many developing States to exercise either their sovereign rights over marine resources of their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) or to participate in marine scientific research in the Area. The Secretary-General announced that the United Kingdom had made a contribution to the Fund and that Spain had indicated its commitment to do so in the near future.

Deliberation on the Secretary-General’s report also highlighted a need for international cooperation in marine scientific research and for more information on sulphides and crusts in the development of regulations on prospecting and exploration of those minerals. Bangladesh called for increased participation of scientists of developing countries in marine research.

The Republic of Korea felt that further knowledge of new technologies and of the marine environment was necessary before finalization of the regulations. The representative of France urged further discussions on the size and location of a network of representative preservation zones in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone, in light of recent findings by French scientists since the Kaplan project.
The Netherlands said that the Authority’s focus on developing scientific data about the deep seabed had revealed that knowledge in this field was incomplete. The lack of information, however, should not deter the Authority’s efforts to develop a regulatory framework as scientific knowledge “will never be complete.”

Suriname, which is attending a session of the Authority for the first time, commended the organization for moving ahead to establish legal regimes to govern the resources of the seabed.

Responding to issues raised in the debate, the Secretary-General confirmed that a seminar, scheduled for November 19-24 this year on the mineral resources of the international seabed Area, will be hosted by Brazil. He said the information was not available in time to be included in his report. He also confirmed Guyana’s announcement that it was taking steps to become a party to the 1994 Agreement related to the implementation of Part XI of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Twenty-three members of the Authority that were parties to the Convention have yet to become parties to the 1994 Agreement.

The Secretary-General said he would remain available to the Authority after his departure and thanked the members for their support during his twelve-year tenure. “It has been a great honour and privilege to serve you,” he said. The Secretary-General hoped the Authority would be a good resource to the developing countries in helping them play an active role in the activities of the deep seabed.

The Assembly will meet again on Thursday, 5 June.