INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY OPENS
SEVENTEENTH SESSION IN KINGSTON WITH ITS TWO PRINCIPAL BODIES
ELECTING PRESIDING OFFICERS AND ADOPTING THEIR AGENDA

The International Seabed Authority began its seventeenth session today with an extensive agenda which includes finalization of a regime for prospecting and exploration for cobalt-rich crusts in the deep seabed Area and action on pending applications for exploratory contracts.

Peter Thomson, Permanent Representative of Fiji to the United Nations, was this morning elected President of the Authority’s 162-member Assembly. (See biographical note SB/17/3). The new President was nominated by the representative of Bangladesh on behalf of the Asian Group. (Malawi and Thailand are the latest States to become members of the Authority.)

The Assembly adopted a 14-point agenda which includes: election of members of the Finance Committee; the annual report of the Secretary-General which reviews the organization’s activities since the last session and its future work programme.

Four Vice Presidents were elected: Ghana, representing the African Group, and Belgium, Chile and the Russian Federation their respective groups.

In another election, David C.M.Wilkens (Germany) was elected to the Finance Committee to replace his compatriot Michael Hackethal who had resigned. Mr. Wilkens will serve the remainder of the term until December 31, 2011.

The Assembly approved the request of the Center for Oceans Law and Policy for observer status to participate in its work. Founded in 1976, the Center, based at the University of Virginia, United States, supports research, education and discussion of policy and legal issues relating to the oceans.

The Assembly will next meet on Monday, 18 July to begin debate on the report of the Secretary-General.
Council Meeting

The Authority’s 36-member Council, meeting shortly after the Assembly this morning, elected Andrzej Przybycin (Poland) as President for the seventeenth session. He is Deputy Director of the Department of Geology and Geological Concessions in his country’s Environment Ministry. (See biographical note SB/17/4).

Three Vice-Presidents were elected to serve during the Authority’s seventeenth session. Australia and Bangladesh will represent the Western European and Others and Asian Groups, respectively, while the Vice-President for the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States is Jamaica. The African Group will nominate its representative at the next meeting of the Council.

Also elected during this morning’s Council meeting was Russell Howorth (Fiji), who will fill the seat in the Legal and Technical Commission left vacant by the resignation of his compatriot Isikeli Uluinairai Mataitoga. Mr. Howorth will serve the remainder of the term until December 31, 2011.

The substantive work of the Council include finalization of the draft regulation on prospecting and exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the Area (ISBA/16/C/WP.2) and consideration and approval of two applications for contracts for exploration for polymetallic nodules and polymetallic sulphides respectively in the Area. The Council will elect members of the Legal and Technical Commission who will serve from 2012 to 2016. It had previously agreed that for the election, the size of the Commission may be increased for up to 25, without prejudice to future elections.

The Council will next meet on Thursday, 14 July when it will hear the Secretary-General’s report on the Advisory Opinion of the Seabed Disputes Chamber of the Hamburg-based International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on matters relating to the responsibilities and obligations of sponsoring States. Council members will review the Advisory Opinion and discuss its implications for the Authority.

Also on Thursday, the Council will hear a statement from the representative of Nauru as an Observer in the Council.

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