SEABED AUTHORITY CONCLUDES TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY SESSION; ASSEMBLY ELECTS 17 COUNCIL MEMBERS

The historic twentieth session of the International Seabed Authority ended in Kingston this afternoon after its Assembly completed debate on the Secretary-General’s annual report and acted on five decisions including the Authority’s budget for the 2015-2016 biennium. The Assembly set 13-24 July 2015 as the date for the Authority’s next session.

The 166-member Assembly also elected 17 members to fill vacancies in the Authority’s Council for a four-year period, beginning 1 January 2015 (ISBA/20/A/L.6*).

The Assembly approved amendments to regulation 21 of two regulations, one on Prospecting and Exploration for Polymetallic Sulphides (ISBA/20/A/L.3), and the other for Polymetallic Nodules (ISBA/20/A/L.4).

In other action, the Assembly approved the report of the Credentials Committee (ISBA/20/A/6), which was presented by its Chair, Godelieve Van den Bergh (Belgium). She reported that of the Authority’s 166 members, the credentials of 67 were received by the secretariat. The Credentials Committee comprised Belgium, Indonesia, Kenya, Myanmar, Panama, Russian Federation, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Kingdom.

The Assembly President Antonio Francisco Da Costa E Silva Neto (Brazil) then gave the floor to the vice-Chairman of the Finance Committee, Duncan Muhumuza Laki (Uganda) to introduce the report and recommendations of the Finance Committee.

Acting on the recommendation of its Council, the Authority adopted the budget of the Authority for the financial period 2015-2016 in the amount of $15,743,143. The 12-paragraph decision which related to the Authority’s budget (ISBA/20/A/L.2) included three paragraphs that were added by the Council upon its adoption of the recommendations of the Finance Committee. The added paragraphs were:
7. Requests the Secretary-General, in future budget proposals, to provide a complete narrative in support of the proposed budget requests, as well as a breakdown of projected costs in respect of large items of expenditure or those in which a significant variance in relation to the previous budget is proposed;

8. Also requests the Secretary-General to ensure that the budget is in line with the priorities set by the Council and the Assembly, in particular with the need to develop the exploitation code, and to make available all relevant documents used to prepare the reports of the Finance Committee;

12. Expresses appreciation to those members of the Authority who have made voluntary contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund and Endowment Fund for Marine Scientific Research in the Area.

**Election of Council Members**

The Council is composed of five groups of States members of the Authority, four of which have special interests in aspects of seabed mining. The fifth ensures equitable geographical balance in the Council as a whole.

Those elected this afternoon to serve on the 36-member Council for the period 2015 to 2018, in accordance with the Convention on the Law of the Sea and Assembly decisions, are:

**Group A:** Italy and Russian Federation (Italy would relinquish its seat in Group A in favour of the United States if it became a member of the Authority; this does not prejudice the position of any country with respect to any intervening election to the Council).

**Group B:** France, Germany and Republic of Korea (Germany was re-elected for a period of four years (2015-2018), on the understanding that Belgium will occupy the seat in Group B for the year 2016).

**Group C:** Australia and Chile (Australia was re-elected for a period of four years (2015-2018), on the understanding that in 2017 it will relinquish its seat in Group C to Indonesia. Australia will be a member of Group E in 2017. Chile is re-elected for a period of four years (2015-2018), on the understanding that in 2018 it will relinquish its seat in Group C to Indonesia. Chile will be a member of Group E in 2018).

**Group D:** Fiji, Jamaica and Lesotho.

**Group E:** Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Singapore and Tonga (Indonesia was re-elected to the Council for a period of four years (2015-2018) on the understanding that in 2017 it will relinquish its seat in Group E to Australia and will occupy the seat in Group C relinquished by Australia, and in 2018 Indonesia will relinquish its seat in Group E to Chile and will occupy the seat in Group C relinquished by Chile).
Debate on Secretary-General’s report

Earlier, the Assembly at its morning meeting concluded its debate on the report of the Secretary-General, Nii Allotey Odunton (Ghana) which reviewed the inter-governmental body’s activities for the past year and its future work programme.

The Netherland’s call for a multi-year work plan for the adoption of regulations for exploitation of mineral resources of the deep seabed was echoed by Brazil, New Zealand, Australia, and Jamaica. Delegations felt that an incremental approach to the important task of formulation those regulations would not be efficient.

Regarding overhead charges for the administration and supervision of exploration contracts, Brazil suggested an approach to determining reasons why some contractors had not agreed to signing the amended contract.

Responding, the Secretary-General said the work plan would be developed in collaboration with the Legal and Technical Commission to include the projected number of meetings of the Commission and Council and the number of workshops to be held. He said the work plan would be completed in time for the 2015 session. On the issue of fees, Mr. Odunton said that would be a matter for the Commission to consider when contract extensions were discussed with contractors.

Other matters

Under other matters, Tonga announced that it would contribute $1,000 to the Endowment Fund for Marine Scientific Research in the Area.

A question related to reporting relationship of the president of the Council and the Assembly was raised. Brazil, in its interpretation of Article 162, paragraph 2 (h) of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, felt that a report by the Council’s president should be included as an agenda item of the Assembly. The representative of the Netherlands, supporting Brazil, said it would be useful to have such a document for discussion. Trinidad and Tobago said it shared Brazil’s interpretation of the relevant article.

Jamaica thanked delegates for their expressions of appreciation towards the host country and its people, and promised to address any issue concerning the facilities which housed the Authority’s secretariat.