INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY OPENS HISTORIC TWENTIETH SESSION IN KINGSTON; ELECTS PRESIDENTS AND ADOPTS AGENDA

The International Seabed Authority, celebrating twenty years in existence, began its annual session this morning at Kingston, with its two major organs - the Assembly and the Council - electing their presidents and approving their indicative work programme for the next ten days.

The Assembly also elected three vice-presidents, a member to the Authority’s Finance Committee and granted an Observer status to a Netherlands foundation. At its meeting following the adjournment of the Assembly, the Council elected its president and vice-presidents as well as three new members to the Authority’s expert body, the Legal and Technical Commission.

Antonio Francisco Da Costa e Silva Neto (Brazil) was elected president of the Assembly for the twentieth session. He is currently his country’s Ambassador to Jamaica (See biographical note SB/20/3). The new president was nominated by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Three of the Assembly’s four Vice-presidents elected this morning are: China, who was nominated by Japan on behalf of the Asian Group and France and Nigeria, nominated by the Western European and Others Group and African Group respectively.

Nicola Smith (United Kingdom) was elected by the Assembly as a new member of the Finance Committee to replace her compatriot Chris Whomersley, who resigned on 6 June 2014. She will serve the remainder of his term which ends on 31 December 2016. (ISBA/20/A/4)

In another action, the Assembly granted observer status to the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, a foundation incorporated in the Netherlands, whose objective is protecting and preserving the marine environment, including living marine resources and marine biodiversity. Information on the Coalition is contained in ISBA/20/1/INF/1. A second request for observer status (ISBA/20/A/INF/2), submitted by the United States-based Committee for Mineral Reserves International Reporting Standards (CRIRSCO), will be taken up by the Assembly next week once a member states have reviewed the request.

Other items on the Assembly’s agenda include are the annual report of the Secretary-General, a report of the Finance Committee, adoption of the Authority’s budget Assembly and election to fill vacancies on the Council.

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The Assembly will meet next on Tuesday, 22 July in a day-long special session to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Seabed Authority. The Authority was established on 16 November 1994 with the entry into force of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The commemoration has been brought forward to coincide with the Authority’s twentieth annual session.

**Council**

The Council met immediately following the Assembly meeting, and elected Tommo Monthe (Cameroon) as its president for this year’s session. Mr. Monthe is his country’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York and the International Seabed Authority. (See biographical note SB/20/4).

Three Vice-Presidents were elected in the Council - Argentina, Bangladesh and Netherlands - nominated by the Latin American and Caribbean Group, the Asian Group and the Western European and Others Group respectively.

The Council also elected three new members to the Legal and Technical Commission (LTC). Carlos Roberto Leite (Brazil), Juan Pablo Paniego (Argentina) and Michelle Walker (Jamaica) will serve the remainder of the five-year term of their compatriots who have resigned. Their term will end on 31 December 2016. (ISBA/20/C/2; ISBA/20/C/3; ISBA/20/C/8).

During the first week of its session, the Council will examine reports of the Secretary-General on the status of contracts for exploration and related matters (ISBA/20/C/12 and ISBA/20/C/12/Add.1), and on national legislation relating to deep seabed mining submitted by member States (ISBA/20/C/11 and ISBA/20/C/11/Add.1).

Three meetings have been scheduled for discussions of a report on the work of the Legal and Technical Commission during its February and July sessions, including recommendations on new applications for approval of plans of work for exploration in the seabed Area.

The Council will also consider a report and recommendations of the Finance Committee on a number of financial matters, including the proposed budget of the Authority for the financial period 2015-2016 and the scale of assessment for contributions to it.

The Council will begin its substantive work tomorrow afternoon, Wednesday, 16 July, with the following on its agenda: a report on the status of contracts for exploration and related matters: information on the periodic review of implementation of plans of work for exploration of polymetallic nodules; and a report of the Secretary-General on the status of national legislation relating to seabed mining and other related matters.

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