INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY OPENS TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL SESSION IN KINGSTON WITH AGENDA, INCLUDING DEVELOPMENT OF MINERALS EXPLOITATION REGULATIONS AND ELECTIONS OF A SECRETARY-GENERAL AND NEW MEMBERS OF VARIOUS ORGANS

The International Seabed Authority began its twenty-second annual session in Kingston, Jamaica, today with a crowded agenda, including elections to its executive Council, two subsidiary organs and of a Secretary-General to steer its activities for the next four years.

The Authority’s supreme organ, the Assembly, and the Council (which met separately after the opening) adopted their agendas and elected their officers for the session.

The 167-member Assembly, elected Md. Khurshed Alam (Bangladesh) as its President for 2016 (See Biographical Note SB/22/3). He was nominated by Tonga on behalf of the Asia and Pacific Group.

Four vice presidents were also elected: Brazil (Latin American and Caribbean Group - GRULAC); Slovakia (Eastern European Group); Mozambique (African Group) and Canada (Western European and Others Group).

A Credentials Committee of nine members, namely, Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Cameroon, Germany, Jamaica, Japan, Myanmar and the Russian Federation, was appointed.

The Assembly elected Ms. Ahila Sornarajah, First Secretary (Legal Affairs) of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the United Nations in New York, to fill a vacancy in the Finance Committee until the end of the year. She succeeds Ms. Nicola Smith, also of the United Kingdom, who resigned last April. Later during the session the Assembly will elect a full slate of 15 Finance Committee members who will serve five-year terms, beginning 1 January 2017.
The following organizations were granted observer status to participate in the work of the Assembly: Vienna-based non-profit Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (ISBA/22/A/INF.1); African Minerals Development Centre based in Addis Ababa (ISBA/22/A/INF.2); Durham University’s Centre for Borders Research, England (ISBA/22/A/INF.3); RESOLVE, based in Washington, D.C., United States; (ISBA/22/A/INF.4); Pew Charitable Trusts, based in Philadelphia, Pa. United States (ISBA/22/A/INF.5); and Deep-Ocean Stewardship Initiative (ISBA/22/A/INF.6).

The Assembly will begin its substantive work on 19 July with the introduction by Secretary-General Nii Allotey Odunton (Ghana) of his annual report, as required by Article 166 paragraph 4 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Authority was established in 1994 when the Convention entered into force that year. Delegates will have the opportunity at two meetings to comment on the Secretary-General’s report which reviews the Authority’s activities since the last session in 2015 and outlines its future programmes.

The Assembly will, among other actions, examine an interim report of a Committee it appointed at the last session to undertake a general and systematic review of the manner in which the international regime of the seabed Area established by the Convention (Article 154) had operated in practice. The final report of the Committee, Chaired by Helmut Tuerk (Austria), President of the Assembly’s twenty-first session, would be submitted at the twenty-third session.

The Assembly will consider recommendations of the Finance Committee and the Council on the Authority’s budget for the financial period 2017-2018 and the scale of assessment for contributions of members. It will conduct three elections towards the end of the session: members of the Finance Committee for a new five-year term of office; filling of vacancies in the Council and a Secretary-General of the Authority for the period 2017-2020.

The next meeting of the Assembly will take place on Tuesday, 19 July, when it will hear the annual report of the Secretary-General.

Council

Meeting shortly after the Assembly’s adjournment, the Council also adopted its agenda and elected Mariusz Orion Jędrysek (Poland) as President for the current session. (See Biographical Note SB/22/4). Two vice-presidents were also elected: India for the Asia and Pacific Group and Mexico for GRULAC.

The Council also elected Nobuyuki Okamoto, Director, Seafloor Mineral Resources Research and Development Division at Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation, to succeed a compatriot who had resigned from the Legal and Technical Commission.

The terms of office of members of the Commission will end on 31 December 2016, with a new set of members who will serve for five years, from 1 January 2017, being elected by the Council during the present session.

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The Council began its substantive work with consideration of a report by the Secretary-General on the status of contracts for exploration in the deep seabed Area and related matters (ISBA/22/C/5).

**Status of contracts for exploration**

The report provided information on the status of contracts covering polymetallic nodules, polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts for which the Authority has adopted regulations for their prospecting and exploration.

As at 27 April 2016, 24 contracts for exploration had entered into force (15 for polymetallic nodules, 5 for polymetallic sulphides and 4 for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts). Annexed to the report is a complete list of the contracts with details, including the dates of entry into force and expiry of each contract.

Since July 2015, two new contracts have been signed covering exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts, with Companhia de Pesquisa de Recursos Minerais S.A.; and a contract for exploration for polymetallic nodules with the UK Seabed Resources Ltd.

The Secretary-General mentioned two other contracts which are expected to be signed this year: one with the Cook Islands Investment Corporation for exploration for polymetallic nodules; and another with the Government of India for exploration for polymetallic sulphides. This will bring to total to 26 contracts.

The Secretary-General also provided an update on the implementation of the annual overhead charge levied by the Assembly in 2013 for the administration and supervision of contracts. The charge of $47,000 is to be paid by each contractor by 31 March each year. The decision is to be implemented through two new clauses (sects. 10.5 and 10.6) added to the standard clauses for contracts for exploration.

As at 30 June 2016, the Secretary-General reported, a total of $1,410,000 had been collected. In 2014, $141,000 was paid by Deep Ocean Resources Development Co. Ltd (DORD), Tonga Offshore Mining Liming (TOML) and UK Seabed Resources Ltd. (UKSRL). In 2015, nine contractors paid $470,000, and for the first six months of 2016, $799,000 had been received to cover the overhead charges of 17 exploration contracts.

He further noted that although UK Seabed Resources (since 2014) and the Government of India (since 2015) had been paying the $47,000 overhead charge, neither of these contractors had formally accepted the standard clauses 10.5 and 10.6 into their exploration contracts for polymetallic nodules. The Secretary-General encouraged both parties to do so as soon as possible.

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Among the 22 items listed on the Council’s provisional agenda are reports of the Finance Committee and the Chairman of the Legal and Technical Commission on their deliberations in 2016. (The Commission met from 22 February to 4 March 2016 and is scheduled to conclude on 13 July, a second session which began on 4 July. The Finance Committee met from 6 to 11 July 2016).

Two meetings have been scheduled for discussion of the report of the Chairman of the Commission which is expected to cover a range of issues, including progress on the elaboration of the minerals exploitation regulations, extension of exploration contracts as well as the Commission’s responses to matters previously referred to it by the Council.

A number of side events by various entities have been scheduled throughout this year’s session: Deepsea Coalition, International Hydrographic Organization, Nautilus Minerals, International Cable Protection Committee, Global Sea Mineral Resources, Pew Charitable Trusts, RESOLVE, UK Seabed Resources, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art21 and Managing Impacts of Deep Sea Resources Institute.

When the Council meets on Wednesday afternoon, 13 July, it will discuss the implementation of plans of work; the status of national legislation relating to deep seabed mining, cooperation with other international organizations and issues related to marine scientific research in exploration areas.

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