The Assembly of the International Seabed Authority, on the eve of its final Kingston session, this afternoon completed consideration of the report of Secretary-General Satya N. Nandan, deferring action on the Authority’s budget to enable one delegation to consult its Government.

The Budget, which calls for an expenditure of $US10,816,700 over 2005-2006 financial year, had earlier in the day been endorsed by the Authority’s Council.

Resuming its examination of the report, the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority considered the document (ISBA1/0/A/3) presented on Monday, 31 May which gave an account of the work undertaken by the Authority over the past twelve months. The document also reports on progress and major achievements of the Authority since its establishment ten years ago and sets out the programme of work envisioned for the next three years.

The main topics touched on in this afternoon’s discussions included the low level of attendance at annual sessions and the role of the Authority in ensuring the protection of the marine environment.

Several delegations congratulated the Secretary-General on the quality of the report, which they described as detailed and comprehensive.

In its capacity as Chairman of the Latin American and Caribbean States Group, (GRULAC), Brazil voiced concern over the low level of attendance at the meetings of the Authority, especially of its Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee.

With regard to the substantive work of the Authority, GRULAC endorsed the main guidelines as set out by the Secretary General’s report, saying it looked forward to
the elaboration of a strategic plan for the Secretariat that would hasten progress towards the ultimate goal of the commencement of commercial activities in the international seabed Area. Brazil expressed satisfaction at the attention being given to new issues relating to ocean activities, one of which was the critical issue of the sharing of benefits derived from the genetic material of seabed biodiversity.

The United Kingdom deplored the fact that as at 31 January 2004, only 46 members had paid their contributions, and appealed to members to fulfill their financial obligations to the Authority. He encouraged States which had not already done so to take steps to become party to the Convention.

Canada, (one of Authority’s newest members, having ratified the Convention and the Agreement late last year), described the Secretary-General’s report as a useful account of the Authority’s work to date and its priorities for the next three years. The speaker said the work of the LTC was helpful in informing the discussions on how to protect bio-diversity in the Area and encouraged coordination between the Authority and other relevant organizations.

Norway noted that it was the Authority’s responsibility to promote and encourage scientific marine research while ensuring the protection of the marine environment. It noted with satisfaction that this issue was a priority item in the Secretary-General’s report.

The representative of Bahamas spoke of his country as a small island State “whose economic breath is drawn from the tourism industry.” Hence the importance, he said, of remaining vigilant in matters concerning marine environment protection. He also stressed the importance for small States to increase their capacity to participate in the work of the Authority through training and looked forward to the day when he would attend meetings with a team of trained experts from his country.

Australia welcomed the focus of the three-year work plan. He observed that the Authority was not the only institution expressing interest in the issue of how to manage risks to the environment and the biodiversity of the oceans, and joined Canada in urging the Authority to strengthen links with other organizations working in this field.

Mexico began by underlining how important it was that the exploration and the future exploitation of the seabed should be carried out within the ambit of the provisions

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of the Convention. The speaker welcomed the Authority’s efforts to standardize data and information on the world’s oceans and encouraged it to cooperate with other organizations for the further purpose of information gathering. Mexico considered that the Law of the Sea convention and the Convention on Bio-Diversity contained provisions that supported the principle of the equitable distribution of benefits derived from the genetic resources of the Area.

Kenya appealed to the Authority, on behalf of African states, to conduct some of its training seminars and technical workshops in that region as a way of exposing African scientists and researchers to issues related to the deep seabed. Tunisia said every effort must be made to preserve the balance established under the Convention by providing for the transfer of technology to developing countries.

Wrapping up the Assembly discussion on his report, the Secretary-General said the Authority could explore ways to fund training, which had been conducted only by the Pioneer Investors some time ago. Replying to a query on the whereabouts of the few persons that had received technical training, he said some had been traced and a report done. On requests for simplified reports he said he understood the difficulty and would try to find solutions.

Mr. Nandan congratulated Norway for its contribution to the voluntary trust fund and encouraged members to help promote better attendance at meetings of the Authority. He took note of a request by the Republic of Korea to update information on contractors.

He said he would follow-up a request to have a photograph of Dr. Helmut Beiersdorf mounted in the library of the Secretariat. Dr. Beiersdorf, who was a member of the Legal and Technical Commission since 1998, died suddenly at the weekend. More tributes were paid to him during debate on the budget in the Assembly today.

Concluding his remarks, the Secretary-General paid tribute to the members of staff of the Secretariat for their dedicated service. In response to a call for regional representation on the staff, Mr. Nandan said every effort was made in that regard but that the Secretariat must recruit people with relevant qualification and experience.

Yemen and Nigeria announced their support for Ambassador Charles Manyang D’Awol, the African Union’s candidate for the position of Secretary-General of the Authority.

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On other matters, Poland requested more time to present a candidate from the Eastern European states to fill a vacancy on the Finance Committee, while Japan requested that the Assembly postpone adoption of the budget pending instructions from his government. The representative of Japan had raised objections in the Council to a number of items in the budget proposals.

The Assembly will meet tomorrow to take action on the budget.