

International Seabed Authority

Press Release



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**SEABED ASSEMBLY TAKES NOTE OF ANNUAL REPORT OF
AUTHORITY'S SECRETARY-GENERAL AFTER LENGTHY DEBATE.
PAYS TRIBUTE TO LATE JAMAICAN JURIST
FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO LAW OF THE SEA**

The Assembly of the International Seabed Authority, meeting in Kingston this afternoon, completed consideration and took note of the annual report of the Secretary-General. It also paid glowing tribute to the late Kenneth Osborne Rattray, a prominent Jamaican jurist who was involved for many years in the negotiations leading to the conclusion of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

A minute of silence was observed by the Assembly in honour of one of its own and for many years permanent representative of Jamaica to the International Seabed Authority. Dr. Rattray died January 3 of this year, at age 72.

In his tribute, the Secretary-General of the Authority, Satya N. Nandan, said Dr. Rattray was associated with the Law of the Sea since 1968 when he participated as a representative of Jamaica in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of the Seabed and the Ocean Floor Beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction. In 1970, the Committee became the Preparatory Committee for the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, and three years later, it was formally convened. He was elected as its Rapporteur-General.

Dr. Rattray was an able and articulate representative of Jamaica whose views were much respected by his colleagues in the Conference. He contributed to the development of the 1982 Convention, especially to its deep seabed mining provisions. Subsequently, between 1982 to 1994, he was an active participant in the Preparatory Commission for the establishment of the Authority and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

In particular, the Secretary-General said Dr. Rattray was successful in persuading the Conference to choose Jamaica as the headquarters of the International Seabed Authority.

Following the entry into force of the Convention and the establishment of the headquarters of the Authority in Kingston in 1994, Dr. Rattray was appointed as the Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the Authority until he retired due to ill health.

The Secretary-General said Dr. Rattray was an illustrious son of Jamaica who served his country with distinction. He was Solicitor-General for many years and would be remembered for his many contributions to the Law of the Sea and would be sadly missed by his friends and colleagues from around the world who worked with him on the Law of the Sea over many years.

Launching the tributes from the floor, Indonesia hailed Dr. Rattray as a founding father of the International Seabed Authority and not only a great son of Jamaica, but the Caribbean and Latin America. Austria said that as a “household name” in Law of the Sea circles since 1968, Dr. Rattray was one of the strongest defender of the deep seabed being the common heritage of mankind. Brazil echoed those sentiments, saying the magnitude of his contribution was eloquently grasped by the Secretary-General.

Trinidad & Tobago hoped that the family would be comforted in the thought that long after Dr. Rattray’s passing, his work and convictions would continue to be an inspiration and guiding light for the Authority. Cameroon praised his erudition and eloquence as a man of law and urged members of the Assembly to keep Dr. Rattray’s memory alive “as we work to protect the common heritage of mankind.”

Russia remembered him as an outstanding jurist and major contributor to the Convention on the Law of the Sea. “He truly loved his country,” the Russian delegate said, noting that Dr. Rattray spared no efforts to win the headquarters of the Authority for Jamaica. Russia always regarded the conference centre as the “Ken Rattray conference centre” because it was Dr. Rattray’s idea to have the Authority based in Kingston.

Nigeria, Bangladesh and Papua New Guinea recognized Dr. Rattray for his invaluable contribution to the Authority and his sensitivity to the concerns of developing States. Canada said two generations of that country’s delegation regarded the Authority as a tribute to the work of the Honorable Kenneth Rattray.

Responding on behalf of the Government of Jamaica, Raymond Wolfe, its permanent representative to the Authority, thanked the Secretary-General and members of the Assembly for their tributes which highlighted the extent of Dr. Rattray’s contribution to the Authority. He asked the Assembly to prepare a summary of the tributes for presentation to the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and the family of the late Ambassador.

Resuming consideration of the Secretary-General's report (agenda item 7), Ghana announced an offer to host a regional training course on the delineation of the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond the 200 nautical miles and on the preparation of submissions. The course, being organized by the Division of Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the United Nations Secretariat, in cooperation with the Government of Ghana, is scheduled to be held in early December 2005. He called for a sustained system of capacity-building and training programmes for scientists and officials from the Third world.

Brazil and Australia welcomed the close cooperation being developed between the Authority and the United Nations Division of Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea. On the need for a significant strengthening of the technical capabilities of the secretariat, Brazil asked the Secretary-General to notify the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States which would recommend qualified candidates so as to increase the Group's representation on the staff of the secretariat.

The Secretary-General's proposed trust fund to enhance participation of scientists from developing countries in research activities conducted by the Authority, received support from Argentina, Brazil, China, France, Greece, Indonesia, Kenya, Portugal, Tanzania, Tunisia and The Republic of Yemen. Members of the Assembly and the United States Observer looked forward to a detailed report with a list of criteria to support the Secretary-General's proposal. Delegations felt that the marginal participation of developing states in the substantive work of the Authority would be improved with the adoption of the proposal.

Many delegations called on States that had signed the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea but had not become party to the 1994 Agreement (seabed mining provisions) to take action soon. China, Namibia, Nigeria and Senegal said full membership would put all nations on equal footing to work in concert with the Authority.

Members were also encouraged to pay their assessed contributions to the Authority. As of June 2005, thirty seven (37) members of the Authority were in arrears for a period of two years or more.

Commenting on the substantive work of the Authority, delegations, including Australia, Brazil, China, Indonesia, Kenya, Namibia, Senegal and the United States called for continued precautionary approach to the drafting of regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts deposits in the Area.

The representative of Nigeria, speaking on behalf of the African Group at the session, commended the Secretary-General for his excellent report. He also commended the Legal and Technical Commission for the comprehensive draft proposals on regulations and guidelines for prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich crusts in the international seabed Area.

On the future work of the Authority, Indonesia noted that the Secretary-General's report made no mention of methane hydrates which could become a major mineral resource that would have to be regulated by the Authority.

Security for the staff of the Authority in Kingston was raised by the Chinese delegation which asked the host country, Jamaica, to take steps to ensure their safety. China was the second delegation to mention security during the Assembly deliberations. During consideration of the Secretary-General's report at the 18 August Assembly meeting, the United Kingdom's representative said an issue overlooked in the report was security for the Authority's staff.

In response, Jamaica said it could not understand the nature of the security concerns expressed by the delegations. His Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade had not received any indication from the Secretariat of serious security threats to staff. He said Block 11 of the Jamaica Conference Centre, in which the secretariat is located, had been designated UN House which put it in a special security zone.

He said two United Nations security teams had visited Jamaica – one after the September 11 incident and the other following the bombing of the UN building in Baghdad, Iraq – and requested new updated security measures, which had been put into effect. Those included a set of sophisticated security cameras, heavy security presence and a security link with Jamaica's Central Command and International Seabed Authority security. The Jamaican delegate urged members of the Assembly to enjoy themselves in the island but "use common sense", as they would do in any other city in the world, to ensure their safety.

Nigeria, which has a permanent mission in Kingston, said any security concerns for the staff of the Secretariat should be addressed by the Secretary-General and not individual delegations. Brazil said his delegation had always felt safe in Jamaica. The United Kingdom said it was never its intention, in its comments at a previous meeting, to question the security measures established for the Authority by Jamaica. During the deliberations, many delegations praised the warm Jamaican hospitality experienced during the current and previous sessions.

Wrapping up the deliberations, Secretary-General Nandan responded to the Group of Latin American and Caribbean states' request for a long term programme of work for the Authority as well as the group's call for more representation on the staff of the Secretariat. He also assured France that there was no danger of the Authority becoming a workshop factory. France had earlier expressed concern at the number of workshops being planned in the future.

The Assembly will meet again at 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, to consider the reports of the Credentials and Finance Committees.