

# International Seabed Authority

## Press Release

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### EXPERTS ASSESS ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SEABED AUTHORITY AS COMMEMORATION OF AUTHORITY'S TENTH ANNIVERSARY CONTINUES

The achievements of the International Seabed Authority were reviewed this afternoon in Kingston, in a first of two panel discussions organized by the Authority as part of its tenth anniversary celebrations which began Tuesday morning.

The panelists included Dr. Hasjim Djalal of Indonesia, the first President of the Assembly of the Authority who spoke on the establishment of institutions of the Authority; Inge Zaamwani from Namibia, a former Chairperson of the Legal and Technical Commission, who reviewed the work of the Commission from 1997 to the present; and Dr. Yuri Kazmin of the Russian Federation who spoke on administering the polymetallic nodule resources of the deep seabed. Two perspectives of the status of activities of contractors and prospects for mining were provided by Harsh K. Gupta of India and Mao Bin of China.

Dr. Djalal gave an overview of the establishment of the various institutions of the Authority, noting that issues connected with the election of Assembly President every year had generally not been controversial. The problem now was the achievement of a quorum at meetings of the Authority for decisions to be made. According to Article 159 paragraph 5 of the Convention, the quorum of the Assembly was the majority of its members, which now meant about 74 or 75 seats. Yet, it had become increasingly difficult to maintain the attendance of at least 75 States in the Assembly, particularly those from developing countries.

A number of measures had been proposed to overcome the problem, including holding sessions of the Authority every two years, or holding a meeting of the Assembly outside Jamaica, such as at United Nations headquarters in New York. But the Convention stated specifically that "the seat of the Authority shall be in Jamaica" where meetings should be held but did not indicate that all sessions should indeed be held there. Last year a trust fund was established to finance the participation of developing countries in the work of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee.

Dr. Djalal also discussed the functioning of the Authority's executive Council which had the power of making recommendations to the Assembly. The first Council met in 1996 and since then the President had been elected every year without serious problems. While the distribution

of seats in the 36-member Council was originally controversial, the problem had generally been solved satisfactorily, and the rotation of memberships among the various groups (A, B, C, D and E) had been generally manageable, he said.

He also touched upon factors affecting the work of the Authority including the uncertain prospects of any form of commercial mining from the international seabed area. He noted that during the last several years, the Authority had concentrated on establishing and building up a workable organization set-up and adopting the necessary rules of procedures for its various organs or adoption of rules for its organization and Secretariat. The Authority had increasingly been paying attention to the technical, technological and environmental aspects of seabed mining by involving the participation of more developing countries in workshops and seminars it had organized.

In an overview of the work of the Legal and Technical Commission, (LTC), Ms Inge Zaamwani (Namibia) said milestones achieved since 1997 included the mining code, guidelines for the assessment of environmental impacts in the international seabed area, plans of work for pioneer investors to begin exploration and the issuing of work contracts. The LTC also designed and recommended a format and structure of reports submitted by contractors, which was adopted by the Authority.

Ms. Zaamwani made some general observations, which she said were personal, and not the views of the LTC or her government. She said the governing principles relating to the development of resources in the Area remain relevant and laudable, but the Authority could do more to promote and encourage the conduct of marine scientific research. Pointing the way forward, she said the Authority must become more visible internationally, and the Secretariat should more vigorously monitor contractors to ensure that they carried out activities to which they had agreed.

“Administering the Polymetallic Nodule Resources of the Deep Seabed,” was the title of the presentation by Dr. Yuri Kazmin (Russian Federation). Noting that polymetallic sulphides remained the major resources of the international seabed area. Dr. Kazmin reminded delegates that Polymetallic Nodule resources of the deep seabed led to the adoption of the Declaration of Principles by the United Nations General Assembly in 1970 and to the concept of the common heritage of mankind. These resources also led to the creation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the establishment of the Authority, he said.

Dr. Kazmin presented an overview of a geological model of polymetallic nodules in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone. This model, on which work began in 2003, was a major project of the Authority. In his overview, Dr. Kazmin highlighted the distribution of nodules, their composition, abundance and metal content, and factors related to their formation and grade. He said the project would be completed by 2006 with the construction of mathematical models to create simulations of nodule parameters and fields thereby increasing the amount of data available on these resources.

### Activities of Contractors

The two final speakers presented different perspectives on the status of activities of contractors and prospects for mining in the deep seabed. Mr. Mao Bin, Secretary-General of the China Ocean Mineral Resources R&D Association (COMRA), gave an overview of China's initiatives and investment for exploration of deep seabed resources and the status and prospects for COMRA's activities in the area.

Mr Mao Bin explained that China started conducting exploration for mineral resources in the deep seabed in the mid-70s, and after she became a signatory to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, a national programme was established for survey, research and development of those resources. COMRA was registered as a pioneer investor in 1990, and in May 2001, entered into contract with the Authority, and with an approved plan of work, began its exploration in the contract area in accordance with a 15-year plan set up by the Chinese government.

COMRA's activities in the Area focused on resources exploration and assessment, environment research and protection, and technology development. While acknowledging that commercial mining of the resources in the deep seabed was the final goal of the activities in the Area, Mr Mao Bin said he could not predict when commercial mining would become a reality or which mineral would be mined first.

The other perspective on the activities and mining prospects in the deep seabed came from Dr. Harsh K Gupta, Secretary of the Department of Ocean Development in India. He outlined the activities of his country from 1982 when it became the first registered pioneer investor with the United Nations. From the outset, he explained, India became very involved in the issue of protecting the environment. A number of investigations were carried out to monitor how sites recover after disturbances caused by exploration activities. From these investigations a predictive model could be developed so as to minimize the impact of activities.

Dr. Gupta emphasized the importance of collaboration and exchange of data and technology among pioneer investors to avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts.

Today's panel was chaired by the President of the Council, Baidy Diene (Senegal). Tomorrow morning, the second panel will examine future directions and prospects for the Authority, as the special commemorative session continues.

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