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Annual report of the Secretary-General under article 166, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

Report of the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority under article 166, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted to the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority pursuant to article 166, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982 (the Convention). It provides information on the work of the Authority for the period from July 2023 to April 2024.

2. As the practice has developed since 2020, the annual report of the Secretary-General has been presented in two formats. The present report provides information on the status of the Convention and related legal instruments, the status of the Area, the status of contributions to the budget of the Authority, the status of contracts for exploration in the Area, a summary of the main outcomes of the previous session of the Authority and other noteworthy information. It should be read in conjunction with the fully illustrated annual report for 2024, entitled “Leading precautionary and responsible governance of the ocean global commons based on science, solidarity and transparency”.

II. Membership of the Authority

3. All States parties to the Convention are ipso facto members of the Authority.¹ As at 29 April 2024, there were 169 parties to the Convention (168 States and the European Union), and thus there were 169 members of the Authority. The membership has remained unchanged since Rwanda became a party to the Convention on 18 May 2023. As at 29 April 2024, there are 152 parties to the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 (1994 Agreement). This almost universal membership has strengthened the Part XI regime over the last 30 years.

* ISBA/29/A/L.1

¹ In accordance with article 156, paragraph 2, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

4. There are 17 members of the Authority that became parties to the Convention before the adoption of the 1994 Agreement and have yet to become parties to it, namely Bahrain, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominica, Egypt, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Mali, the Marshall Islands, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sao Tome and Principe, Somalia and the Sudan.

5. As provided under General Assembly resolution 48/263 and the 1994 Agreement itself, the provisions of the latter and of Part XI of the Convention are to be interpreted and applied together as a single instrument. In the event of any inconsistency between the 1994 Agreement and Part XI of the Convention, the provisions of the Agreement shall prevail. Although members of the Authority that are not parties to the 1994 Agreement participate in the work of the Authority under arrangements based on that Agreement, becoming a party to the 1994 Agreement would remove any incongruity that currently exists for those States. The Secretary-General encourages those States to become parties to the 1994 Agreement at the earliest possible opportunity. The secretariat sent a note verbale to each of those States on 15 February 2024.

III. The Area

6. The Convention defines the Area as the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. Establishing the exact geographical limits of the Area thus depends on the delineation of the limits of national jurisdiction, including the delineation of the continental shelf extending beyond 200 nautical miles from the baseline of the territorial sea. Pursuant to article 84, paragraph 2, of the Convention, coastal States are obliged to give due publicity to charts or lists of geographical coordinates and, in the case of those showing the outer limit lines of the continental shelf, to deposit a copy of each such chart or list with the Secretary-General of the Authority. As at 26 April 2024, 16 members of the Authority have deposited such charts and lists with the Secretary-General, namely: Australia, Cabo Verde, Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire, France (with respect to Guadeloupe, Guyana, the Kerguelen Islands, Martinique, New Caledonia, Saint-Paul et Amsterdam and La Réunion), Ghana, Ireland, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, Niue, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Senegal and Tuvalu.

7. The Secretary-General urges all coastal States to deposit the charts or lists of coordinates as soon as possible after the establishment of the outer limit lines of their continental shelf, up to and beyond 200 nautical miles, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Convention. Knowledge of the precise delineation of all areas of continental shelf up to and beyond 200 nautical miles is critical to allow the establishment of the geographical limits of the Area with certainty. Each year, the secretariat sends out a note verbale requesting the deposit of such charts or lists of coordinates. The last such note was sent out on 22 February 2024.

IV. Permanent missions to the Authority

8. As at 30 April 2024, 39 Members maintain permanent missions to the Authority. They are Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, the Dominican Republic, France, Gabon, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Namibia, Nauru, Nigeria, Panama, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Zimbabwe and the European Union.

9. During the reporting period, new permanent representatives of six States presented their credentials to the Secretary-General, namely the representatives of Burkina Faso, India, Indonesia, Mauritania, Philippines and Sierra Leone.

V. Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Seabed Authority

10. The Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Seabed Authority was adopted by the Assembly on 27 March 1998 and entered into force on 31 May 2003. The total number of parties to the Protocol remains at 48: Albania, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, Croatia, Cuba, Czechia, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Guyana, India, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Lithuania, Mauritius, Mozambique, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Uruguay. A further 10 States have signed the Protocol but have yet to ratify it: Bahamas, Côte d'Ivoire, Indonesia, Kenya, Malta, Namibia, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan.

11. Members of the Authority that are not yet parties to the Protocol are strongly encouraged to take the steps necessary to become parties to the Protocol at their earliest convenience. The secretariat sent out a note verbale to that effect on 15 February 2024.

VI. Administrative matters

A. Secretariat

12. The secretariat is one of the principal organs of the Authority. In accordance with article 166 of the Convention, the secretariat comprises a Secretary-General and such staff as the Authority may require. The number of established posts in the secretariat as at 30 April 2024 was 55 (32 Professional, 2 National Professional Officers and 21 General Service) consisting of 28 different nationalities. Amongst the staff of the Secretariat and as a result of the commitment of the Secretary-General to increase the representation of women, 57 per cent of staff members are women, and 50 per cent of senior management positions are women.

13. During the reporting period, the secretariat processed twelve job openings on the United Nations Inspira platform. By the end of April 2024, ten of the twelve vacancies had been filled and new staff members were onboarded. During the first quarter of 2024, one staff member left the organization at the expiration of the appointment and four consultants were hired to support programmatic activities and operations.

B. Participation in the common system of the United Nations

14. The Authority applies the common system of salaries, allowances and other conditions of service of the United Nations and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system. It subscribed to the statute of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), with effect from January 2013.

15. As a participant in the United Nations common system of organizations, the Authority contributes to and participates in the work of the ICSC and utilizes common system services and tools such as Inspira, One HR, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security, the United Nations Appeals Tribunal and United Nations Staff System College. The Authority also contributes to the United Nations Security Management System. This ensures access to disaster evacuation arrangements and

medical evacuations, and participation in the Interagency Security Management Network and relevant Security Training Working Groups. The Authority is not currently a member of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) but has joined its Human Resources, and Budget and Finance networks as an observer. The Authority has led the 2023 comprehensive local salary survey, which was initiated by the ICSC, which has led to an increase of salary for staff members of the General Services category by 21.75 per cent and for National Professional Officers by 13.5 per cent, applicable to all organizations and agencies of the United Nations common system in the duty station of Kingston Jamaica. In addition, the Authority has also implemented the new parental leave framework adopted by the ICSC, providing for 26 weeks of parental leave, to be applied retroactively. Whilst this is a positive development, it has led in some cases to shortages of staff and the need to recruit temporarily in order to maintain delivery of services to member States.

16. On 16 November 2022, the secretariat received a notification from CEB forwarding a proposal from the Fifth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly to amend articles 10 (b) and 11 (c) of the ICSC statute and requesting specialized and related agencies to provide written opinions on the proposed amendment and the process of obtaining a written notification of acceptance. During the twenty-eighth session, acting on recommendation of the Council, the Assembly accepted the amendments² and the Secretary-General notified the Secretary-General of the United Nations of this acceptance on 3 October 2023.

VII. Financial matters

A. Budget

17. With the supplementary budget adopted by the Assembly in July 2023,³ the budget of the Authority for the financial period 2023-2024, is \$22,712,940.

B. Status of contributions

18. In accordance with the Convention and the 1994 Agreement, the administrative expenses of the Authority are to be met by assessed contributions of its members until the Authority has sufficient funds from other sources to meet its administrative expenses. The scale of assessments for this purpose is based on the scale used for the regular budget of the United Nations, adjusted for differences in membership, with a ceiling assessment rate of 22 per cent and a floor assessment rate of 0.01 per cent.

19. Since 2013, the Authority has also applied a system of cost recovery whereby contractors are required to pay an annual overhead charge representing the cost of services provided to them by the Authority. For the financial period 2023-2024, overhead charges are anticipated to account for approximately 22 per cent of the revenues of the Authority.

20. As at 30 April 2024, 60 per cent of the value of contributions to the 2024 budget due from member States and the European Union had been received. As at the same date, outstanding contributions from member States for prior periods (1998-2023) amounted to \$578,019.11. Notices are sent regularly to member States, reminding them of the arrears. In accordance with article 184 of the Convention and rule 80 of the rules of procedure of the Assembly, a member of the Authority that is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions shall have no vote if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of contributions due from it for the preceding two years. In addition, the Secretary-General will communicate to the President of

² ISBA/28/A/14.

³ ISBA/25/A/15.

the Assembly the list of members in arrears prior to the twenty-ninth session of the Assembly.

21. As at 30 April 2024, the balance of the working capital fund stood at \$740,836, against an approved level of \$750,000.

C. Voluntary trust fund for members of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee

22. The Voluntary Trust Fund to cover the costs of participation of members of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee from developing countries was established in 2002. As of 31 March 2024, the total contributions to the fund over its lifetime amounted to \$1,431,924. During the reporting period, contributions were made by China (\$20,000), Philippines (\$12,500) Mexico (\$10,000) and three contractors contributed \$6,000 each.⁴ As at 31 March 2024, the balance of the fund was \$9,968.

D. Voluntary trust fund for members of the Council

23. At its twenty-third session in 2017, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to establish a voluntary trust fund to support the participation of members of the Council from developing States in the additional meetings of the Council convened to work on the draft regulations for exploitation, ensuring inclusive participation.⁵ As of 31 March 2024, the total contributions to the fund over its lifetime amounted to \$211,564. As of 31 March 2024, the balance of the fund was \$25,272.

E. International Seabed Authority Partnership Fund

24. The International Seabed Authority Partnership Fund was established on 3 August 2022 by the Assembly at its twenty-seventh session.⁶ This multi-donor trust fund aims at promoting and encouraging marine scientific research in the Area for the benefit of humankind. It also aims at contributing to dedicated capacity development programmes and activities aligned with the priority needs identified by developing Member States of the Authority. During the reporting period, contributions to the Fund were made by France (\$107,281), Monaco (\$21,518) and the Russian Federation (\$90,024). In addition, a total of \$1,200,000 was transferred from the Endowment Fund for Marine Scientific Research in the Area.

25. The second meeting of the Board of the Fund was held on 29 January 2024. Members⁷ agreed to endorse strategic priorities and proposed activities for 2024 in support of the implementation of strategic research priorities of the Action Plan of the International Seabed Authority in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (the Authority's Action Plan for marine scientific research)⁸ and the key result areas of the capacity development strategy of the International Seabed Authority.⁹ The Board of the Fund approved financial support for the following five projects: The Deep Sea Academy for African Diplomats (\$170,000), Development of a data visualization platform of the Area for the benefit of humankind (\$125,000), Enhancing the knowledge of African experts in deep-sea

⁴ Tonga Offshore Mining Ltd., Nauru Ocean Resources Inc. (NORI) and Marawa Research and Exploration Ltd.

⁵ See ISBA/23/A/13.

⁶ See ISBA/27/A/10 and ISBA/27/FC/3.

⁷ The members of the Board are: Md. Kurshed Alam, Marie Bourrel-Mc Kinnon, Wan-huy Choi, José Dallo, Dwight Gardiner, Neville Gertze, Erasmo Lara Cabrera, Jorun Sigrid Nossun and Bharat Raj Paudyal.

⁸ See ISBA/26/A/17.

⁹ See ISBA/27/A/11.

research through the establishment of the ISA-Egypt Joint Training and Research Centre (\$100,000), Promoting deep-sea research in the Indian Ocean to advance knowledge and understanding in support of seabed minerals exploration (\$52,500), and Advancing the Caribbean Blue Economy through the Centre for Excellence for Oceanography and the Blue Economy (\$100,000).

F. Trust fund for extrabudgetary support for the Authority

26. The Authority receives extrabudgetary funds from member States and other donors to support activities not funded by the approved budget of the Authority. These may be one-off contributions or funds to support multi-year programmes or projects, used in accordance with the terms agreed with the donors, including reporting and audit requirements.

27. In March 2018, the Secretary-General created a multi-donor trust fund for extrabudgetary support for the activities of the Authority. The fund was established pursuant to regulation 5.5 of the Financial Regulations of the Authority and is administered in accordance with the Financial Regulations. Since its creation, the fund has raised \$2,198,058 and had a net balance of \$515,880 as at 31 March 2024. In addition, the European Union contributed \$208,024 to the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative project.

VIII. Previous sessions of the Authority

A. Twenty-eighth session

28. The twenty-eighth session of the Assembly was held in Kingston from 24 until 28 July 2023. The Assembly elected Alhaji Fanday Turay (Sierra Leone) as its President. Belgium, Trinidad and Tobago and Singapore were elected as Vice-Presidents.

29. During the twenty-eighth session, the Assembly considered the annual report of the Secretary-General, submitted in accordance with article 166, paragraph 4, of the Convention. The Assembly approved eight applications for observer status.¹⁰ In its decision approving a supplementary budget for the financial period 2023-2024, the Assembly took note of the forecast budgetary requirements associated with the anticipated evolution of the work of the Authority over the period from 2025 to 2030, and of the need to ensure adequate capacity and resources necessary to fulfil its obligations under the Convention and the 1994 Agreement.¹¹

30. The Assembly decided to include the periodic review of the international regime of the Area pursuant to article 154 of the Convention as an agenda item for the twenty-ninth session of the Assembly (see ISBA/29/A/L.1), with a view to adopting a decision. The Assembly also requested the Finance Committee to consider and report to the Assembly at its next meeting the budgetary implications pertaining to the undertaking of a second periodic review.

31. The Assembly also decided to extend the strategic plan of the Authority for the period 2019-2023 by two years and requested the Secretary-General to review the high-level action plan for the period 2019-2023 with a view to extending it to bring it in line with the strategic plan.¹² The Secretary-General will present a report on these matters for consideration of the Assembly during the twenty-ninth session.

¹⁰ These had been received from China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation, Te Ipukarea Society, Norwegian Forum for Marine Minerals, Arayara International Institute, Minderoo Foundation, Sustainable Ocean Alliance, International Council on Mining and Metals, and Environmental Justice Foundation Charitable Trust.

¹¹ ISBA/28/A/15.

¹² ISBA/28/A/16.

32. The Assembly elected Xing Chaohong (China) to fill the vacant seat on the Finance Committee left by Kejun Fan (China) for the remainder of his term. Upon recommendation of the Finance Committee and of the Council, the Assembly adopted a supplementary budget proposal to cover the costs of the establishment of the position of an interim-Director General of the Enterprise.¹³

33. The Assembly approved the memorandum of understanding between the Authority and the International Relations Institute of Cameroon with a view to formalizing their cooperation in order to design and implement a dedicated capacity development programme to address the specific needs of member States in the region and establish a dedicated curriculum on Part XI of the Convention for African diplomats, to support the development of enhanced knowledge and expertise in African countries, including by developing a series of activities for the dissemination of knowledge and expertise on the law of the sea and in relation to matters pertaining to the implementation of Part XI of the Convention and the 1994 Agreement in Africa. The Assembly also approved the memorandum of understanding between the Authority and the National Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries of Egypt for the establishment of a joint regional training and research centre.

34. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Council at its meeting in March 2024 on the potential overlap of the mandates of OSPAR and of the Authority in light of the decision of the OSPAR Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic to extend the scope of the North Atlantic current and Evlanov Sea basin marine protected area by including the Area.

35. In respect of the Council, the twenty-eighth session was held in three parts: the first part from 16 to 31 March 2023, the second part from 10 to 21 July 2023 and the third part from 31 October to 11 November 2023.

36. At the first part of the session, the Council elected Juan José González Mijares (Mexico) as President. Representatives of Canada, Ghana and the Republic of Korea were elected as Vice-Presidents.

37. As co-facilitators of the informal intersessional dialogue to facilitate further discussion on the possible scenarios foreseen in section 1, paragraph 15, of the annex to the Part XI Agreement and on any other pertinent legal considerations to explore commonalities in possible approaches and legal interpretations for the Council, Belgium and Singapore presented a briefing note to the Council on the progress made on this matter. The Council adopted two decisions relating to the understanding and application of section 1, paragraph 15 of the annex of the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the Convention.¹⁴ The Council in the same vein agreed on a timeline and roadmap for the continued work on the draft regulations for the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area.¹⁵

38. The Council continued its work on the draft regulations for the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area as a matter of priority, following the road map adopted in 2022.¹⁶ The Council made significant progress towards addressing thematic outstanding issues and crucial work was carried out in several intersessional working groups.

39. During the second and third parts, the Council proceeded in accordance with the established modalities, and conducted negotiations of the President's and the facilitators' respective texts. The Council in the same vein agreed on a timeline and roadmap for the continued work on the draft regulations for the exploitation of

¹³ ISBA/25/A/15.

¹⁴ ISBA/28/C/9 ; ISBA/28/C/25.

¹⁵ ISBA/28/C/24.

¹⁶ ISBA/27/C/21/Add.2.

mineral resources in the Area for the third part of the twenty-eight session in 2023 and for the first and second parts of the twenty-ninth session of the Council in 2024.¹⁷ During the second and third parts, several delegations had expressed an interest in making available a consolidated text of the draft exploitation regulations which would identify areas of overlap, duplication and omission and address the need for harmonization between the various provisions and related annexes. Subsequently, in accordance with the Council's decision, the President proceeded to prepare a Consolidated Text, to serve as the basis of further discussions at the meeting of the Council in March 2024.

40. In addition to making progress on the draft regulations on exploitation, the Council also adopted a decision on the establishment of the position of an interim Director-General of the Enterprise, in accordance with the recommendations of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee¹⁸ as well as a decision on the reports of the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission.¹⁹

41. Further agenda items during the twenty-eighth session included the approval of the agreement of cooperation between the International Labour Organization and the Authority, and the election of Rebecca Hitchin (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) as a member of the Legal and Technical Commission for the remainder of the term of Jon Copley (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). In addition, the Council adopted decisions on the deferral of schedules of relinquishment upon requests by the Government of India²⁰ and the Government of the Republic of Korea.²¹

B. First part of the twenty-ninth session of the Council

42. During the first part of the twenty-ninth session (March 2024), the Council elected Olav Myklebust (Norway) as President. Representatives of Brazil, India, and Uganda were elected as Vice-Presidents of the Council.

43. The Council focused its work on the draft exploitation regulations and made substantial progress on the President's Consolidated text which was released on 16 February 2024. Separately, working groups and thematic discussions focused on several outstanding conceptual topics in relation to the draft exploitation regulations, led by facilitators and rapporteurs. At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that the next meeting in July 2024 would continue with the negotiation of the President's Consolidated Text, with a view to completing the first reading of the text. As per decision ISBA/28/C/24, the Council will assess the remaining work that might be needed prior to the adoption of the exploitation regulations at the end of the Council meetings to be held in July 2024, and consider a revised road map to that end.

44. The Council approved the memorandum of understanding between the Authority and the Food and Agricultural Organization and elected María Gómez Ballesteros (Spain) as a member of the Legal and Technical Commission to replace Adolfo Maestro Gonzales (Spain) for the remainder of his term.

45. The Council discussed matters pertaining to the cooperation with the OSPAR Commission and incidents occurred in the NORI-D contract area of the Clarion-Clipperton-Zone.

¹⁷ ISBA/28/C/24.

¹⁸ ISBA/28/C/10, ISBA/28/C/21 and ISBA/28/C/23.

¹⁹ ISBA/28/C/27.

²⁰ ISBA/28/C/22.

²¹ ISBA/28/C/8.

IX. Operationalisation of the Enterprise

46. The year commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the Authority since its establishment is marked by a significant step towards the operationalisation of the Enterprise.

47. The Enterprise is the organ of the Authority which is entrusted to carry out activities in the Area directly, including the transporting, processing and marketing of minerals recovered from it on behalf of the members of the Authority, subject to the directives and under the control of the Council. Once fully operational, the Enterprise will play a crucial role in facilitating the participation of developing States in deep-seabed mining in the Area, as it will be able to carry out such activities in the reserved areas in association with them. Under the 1994 Agreement, the Secretariat carried out some limited functions of the Enterprise until the Council decides that the Enterprise functions independently.

48. After an international recruitment process, Mr Eden Charles (Trinidad and Tobago) was appointed as interim Director-General of the Enterprise to oversee the performance by the secretariat of the functions of the Enterprise until it begins to operate independently.

49. Based at the Headquarters of the Authority, the interim Director-General reports administratively to the Secretary-General while being accountable to both the Council and the Assembly. The Assembly will be presented with the first report of the interim Director-General during its twenty-ninth session.

X. Reporting on prospecting and status of contracts for exploration

50. On 28 February 2023, the Secretary-General duly recorded the notification of the intention from Argeo Survey AS (Argeo) to conduct a prospecting survey at the mid-Atlantic ridge pursuant to regulation 4 of the Regulations on Prospecting and Exploration for Polymetallic Sulphides in the Area. The aim of the survey is to identify potential mineral occurrences. Prospectors are required to submit an annual report describing the status of prospecting and the results obtained. Accordingly, on 7 December 2023, Argeo reported to the Secretary-General on the survey they conducted between April and May 2023, utilising an autonomous underwater vehicle to collect near-seafloor data. The report will be shared with the Legal and Technical Commission.

51. As of 30 April 2024, 30 contracts for exploration were in force (19 for polymetallic nodules, 7 for polymetallic sulphides and 4 for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts). On 19 March 2024, the Secretary-General signed the extension agreement for exploration for polymetallic nodules between the Authority and JSC Yuzhmorgeologiya. Each contractor is required to submit an annual report to the Secretary-General no later than by 31 March each year. The report covers its programme of activities under the contract. For the 2023 reporting period, 30 annual reports in relation to 30 exploration contracts have been received by the secretariat.

52. Contractors are also required to submit five-year periodic reviews on their activities. Between July 2023 and June 2024, four periodic review reports were submitted, namely the periodic review of the implementation of the plans of work of: (i) Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security relating to its contract for exploration of cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts; (ii) Global Sea Mineral Resources NV relating to its contract for exploration of polymetallic nodules; (iii) Government of the Republic of Korea relating to its contract for exploration of polymetallic sulphides, and (iv) China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association (COMRA) relating to its contract for exploration of cobalt-rich

ferromanganese crusts. All these periodic reports are under evaluation, with an anticipated completion date of July 2024.

53. During the reporting period, the secretariat's Compliance Assurance and Regulatory Management Unit (CARMU) conducted an inspection of United Kingdom Seabed Resources Ltd. exploration activities in the Area. The overall objective of the inspection was to review the Contractor's programme of activities for 2025 and 2026 (i.e., the remaining two years of the current five-year programme), and also to ascertain, based on the Contractor's reports to be provided during the inspection, whether the Contractor had addressed the questions and recommendations of the Commission following the review of the Contractor's annual work plan for 2021 and 2022. Based on the review of the information supplied by the Contractor, the organizational performance improvements following the acquisition have been comprehensive, with reassurance on the part of the new parent company of the Contractor to advancing exploration activities and meeting contractual obligations for the contract area.

54. In response to the Council's request regarding the naming of contractors that had responded insufficiently or incompletely, or failed to respond, to the calls from the Council to address issues of concern identified by the Legal and Technical Commission in relation to the fulfilment of their contractual obligations, the Commission adopted criteria for identifying contractors at risk of non-compliance during its meetings in March 2024.²² CARMU will facilitate the three-steps process through which the Commission will assess the responses of contractors to concerns identified and communicated by the Secretary-General in relation to their contractual obligations upon conclusion of the review of annual reports submitted by contractors.

55. Since 2017, the Secretary-General has held six annual consultative meetings with contractors to discuss issues of common interest and share best practices in deep-sea exploration. This also provides an opportunity to discuss the role of the Authority in a global context and engage the support and cooperation of contractors in the programmatic work of the Authority.

56. The sixth annual consultation took place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, from 22 to 24 October 2023, in collaboration with the Government of Tanzania. It was attended by 22 representatives of exploration contractors. Participants discussed the progress made by the Council in advancing the draft regulations on the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area, compliance in the implementation of exploration contracts by contractors, and how to facilitate direct interaction between the Commission and contractors. Discussions were also held on enhancing collaboration among contractors, and the transition from exploration to exploitation. In that regard, the Legal and Technical Commission adopted modalities for facilitating an exchange of views with contractors at its meeting in March 2024.²³

57. The next annual consultation will be held in the Republic of Korea between 30 September and 2 October 2024 and will be jointly hosted by the secretariat and the Korea Institute of Ocean Science and Technology.

XI. Collaboration with the United Nations, its specialised agencies, funds and programmes and Meeting of States Parties to the Convention

58. During the reporting period, the Secretariat has continued to collaborate with the United Nations and its specialized agencies, funds and programmes on matters of

²² ISBA/29/LTC/5.

²³ ISBA/29/LTC/6.

mutual interest, including through UN-Oceans. The Secretariat exchanged with the International Maritime Organization, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Environmental Programme, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. This ongoing collaboration provides a platform for ensuring more effective cooperation in fulfilling the mandate of the Authority, consistent with the Convention and international law.

59. The Secretariat also continued to engage in the work of UN-Oceans actively and participated in a series of technical meetings as well as a meeting of Principals held on 16 January 2024 to discuss cooperation and coordination in relation to the 2023 Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. At this meeting, the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of inter-agency cooperation and coordination and areas where the contribution of the Authority, building on 30 years of experience in effectively regulating and managing the common heritage of humankind, could bring significant added value to support the implementation of the 2023 Agreement.

60. During the reporting period, the Secretariat continued to actively participate in the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science through its contribution to the Ocean Decade Alliance, the United Nations Decade Monitoring and Evaluation working group and the Decade Communications Advisory Group.

61. In April 2024, the Secretariat also participated in the Ocean Decade Conference organized in Barcelona, Spain. This provided an opportunity to present the progress made in the implementation of the Authority's action plan for marine scientific research, discuss future areas of action and exchange best practices.

62. The Secretary-General will participate in the thirty-fourth meeting of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (10-14 June 2024). On the margins of the meeting, the Secretary-General will launch an independent report commissioned to better understand how the Authority can contribute to the implementation of the objectives of the 2023 Agreement.