



## **4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on SIDS**

### **Side Event on “Leveraging partnerships and transformative actions to advance women empowerment and leadership in deep-sea research to support inclusive and sustainable ocean governance”**

**St. John’s, Antigua and Barbuda**

**29 May 2024**

STATEMENT

by

H.E. Mr. Michael W. Lodge

Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

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Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you this morning to our side event on ‘Leveraging partnerships and transformative actions to advance women empowerment and leadership in deep-sea research to support inclusive and sustainable ocean governance’.

I am pleased to recognise that this event, co-hosted by Antigua and Barbuda, is also supported by long-standing partners of the International Seabed Authority, the Cook Islands, Malta, the UN Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries and the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

I attach great importance to the theme we are discussing today. As an International Gender Champion since 2020, I am personally committed to doing everything I can to implement meaningful actions to advance women’s empowerment and leadership in ocean affairs, including in marine scientific research.

This applies to the secretariat of ISA as well, where we have made strenuous efforts to mainstream gender considerations into the working environment and conditions and have not only achieved, but maintained, gender parity levels well above the acceptable range recommended by the UN Common System, including at senior levels.

Big Ocean States (BOSs) recognise that gender equality and women's empowerment can have a transformative and multiplier effect on sustainable development. They also recognise that increasing women leadership, participation and representation is key to safe, prosperous and resilient societies.

ISA fully shares such vision and is doing its part in creating the enabling conditions to advance women's empowerment in ocean affairs and deep-sea research.

For example, in 2021, together with UN-OHRLLS, and 32 partners including seven member States, five international and regional organizations, 15 private sector entities, and several scientific and academic institutions, ISA launched the Women in Deep-Sea Research (WIDSR) project.

A key output of that project was the launch in 2022 of a seminal report titled "Empowering women from LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS in deep-sea research".

That report was the first ever attempt at gender mapping in the field of deep-sea research and related disciplines focused specifically on LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. A particularly important part of that work was an analysis of the barriers faced by women scientists from these groups of countries in accessing leadership positions in deep-sea research related fields.

This important report helped to inform the implementation of ISA's 2020 Action Plan for Marine Scientific Research and the 2022 Capacity Development Strategy.

Equally ground-breaking is the recent launch, under the WIDSR project, of the first global mentoring programme for deep sea research, called See Her Exceed or S.H.E., which builds on a specific recommendation from the report.

S.H.E. is tailored to address the under-representation of women from developing States in deep-sea research by stimulating their personal and professional development to enhance their career opportunities. Eight extremely impressive women scientists from LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS have been selected for this programme so far and have been individually matched with internationally renowned experts who will serve as mentors.

Another key milestone under the WIDSR has been achieved this year. Twenty exploration contractors (out of 22) have now pledged to allocate 50 per cent of training opportunities under the Contractors' Training Programme to qualified female candidates. This is a formidable achievement and, in my view, marks a significant shift towards empowering an emerging cadre of women scientists and researchers, heralding a new era of diversity and innovation in deep-sea research.

We do not intend to rest on our laurels. We are already conceiving new activities and initiatives under the Capacity Development Strategy that will enable us to continue to advance women's empowerment and leadership in deep sea related disciplines.

These include, for example, our new e-learning platform, Deep Dive, which is the first such initiative to specifically address all elements of the legal regime of the Area, including its technical and scientific aspects. We also aim to develop a dedicated gender strategy covering all aspects of ISA's mandate.

Of course, to accelerate our actions we need to mobilize resources.

To this end, in 2022 the Assembly of the Authority established the International Seabed Authority Partnership Fund, a multi-donor trust fund aimed at supporting capacity development programmes that are aligned with the needs of Member States and encouraging marine scientific research.

So far, the Partnership Fund has allocated around 950,000 USD to projects aimed at bolstering deep-sea research, innovation, and capacity development in LDCs, LLDCs and BOSs.

One of the criteria for evaluating projects is that they must make a tangible contribution towards our collective commitment to advancing women's empowerment and leadership in ocean affairs.

I invite all of you today to join our efforts and to become proud ambassadors for this commitment so that we can ensure an inclusive future where women lead sustainable development and resilient prosperity of BOSs for the present and future generations.

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