



**Thirty-fourth Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations  
Convention on the Law of the Sea**

*Agenda item 9: 'Information reported by the Secretary-General of the  
International Seabed Authority.'*

**New York, USA**

**10 June 2024**

STATEMENT

by

H.E. Mr. Michael W. Lodge

Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

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Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

It is a pleasure as always to present information about the work of the International Seabed Authority to the thirty-fourth meeting of States Parties to the Convention. Particularly as this year we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention and by extension, the beginning of the work of the Authority.

Allow me at the outset to offer my congratulations to you Mr President on your election. It is a great pleasure to see you in this position and I trust that your leadership will guide efficiently the discussions of this meeting.

I also wish to thank Ambassador Cornel Feruta of Romania for his work during the past year and in particular his support for the work of the Authority.

I would also like to extend a special word of gratitude and appreciation to the Legal Counsel as he prepares to step down from his role. Throughout his tenure, he has been a stalwart supporter of the rule of law in the ocean, and the integrity of the Convention and the institutions established by the Convention. As Secretary-General, I have personally benefited from his wisdom and experience and we have always enjoyed an excellent working relationship. It has been a privilege to work with him and his team and I wish him the very best for the future.

Let me now extend my deep appreciation to the States Parties for their constant support to the mandate and work of the Authority. The active participation and constructive engagement of numerous delegations during the twenty-eighth session of the Authority in 2023, as well as the first part of the twenty-ninth session in March 2024, is testament to the importance States Parties attach to protecting the integrity of the Convention and its implementing agreements, including the Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of the Convention.

In my statement today, I will briefly outline the progress made on key aspects of the Authority's work and highlight critical issues for consideration during the upcoming second part of the twenty-ninth session.

Given the time constraints, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive overview of the richness and diversity of the work accomplished over the past year. For a detailed account, I refer you to the annual report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Assembly pursuant to Article 166 paragraph 4 of the Convention.

### ***Progress in the development of the regulatory framework for exploitation***

This year again, the priority of the Authority has been to progress the draft regulations for mineral exploitation in the Area.

I remind States Parties that, as agreed in 1994, the Authority's fundamental task is to establish a sound regulatory framework for both exploration and exploitation as activities in the Area progress.

Although individual States Parties and observers in some cases, have expressed different positions regarding any possible future activities in the Area, the vast majority of States Parties have expressed their commitment to continue the negotiations in good faith, recognizing the need to work effectively and diligently towards a strong and comprehensive legal framework as mandated by the Convention and the 1994 Agreement.

Guided by the roadmap it adopted in 2022 and revised in July 2023, the Council has continued its discussions on the draft exploitation regulations.

A major step forward was the release in February 2024 of a revised and consolidated text of the draft regulations, under the authority of the President of the twenty-eighth session. This was in line with the agreed road map and was designed to identify and remedy areas of overlap, duplication, and omission in what had become a very complex text. It also sought to harmonize the text both internally and with the language of the Convention and the 1994 Agreement.

During the first part of the twenty-ninth session, the Council, under its new Presidency, began a complete reading of the consolidated text. The Council also considered several important thematic issues in informal

working groups led by facilitators and rapporteurs. The intention of the Presidency is to continue that work in July, with the aim of completing the entire text and avoiding repetition.

I would like to make several observations about the progress of work and the working methodology in the Council.

*First*, all discussions on the draft regulations have taken place in conditions of the utmost transparency. From the outset, the Council has held all discussions on the regulations in informal session, open to all members of the Authority and observers. Nobody can legitimately claim to have been excluded.

*Second*, at every stage, the Council has invited the broadest possible range of input into the development of the regulations, including in the form of written proposals. Over 1,500 written proposals have been submitted, all of which are published on the ISA website and incorporated into a compilation document. Of course, this also means that it is impossible to implement every individual idea and proposal, but this does not prevent delegations and observers from addressing proposals as they may deem necessary, since all proposals have been consistently published.

*Third*, the use of informal working groups has contributed greatly to the development of the text, especially on more technical matters such as the system for royalties and payments, underwater cultural heritage, mechanisms for stakeholder consultation, and the processes for environmental impact assessment. These groups are playing an important role in advancing the work and making sincere efforts to find compromise solutions between the interested delegations.

*Fourth*, it remains the consistent understanding that the draft regulations constitute a complete package. From the beginning, the Council has worked on the basis that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

I believe that the Council is making good progress and is building consensus around many of the critical outstanding issues in the draft regulations. As always, the Secretariat stands ready to support the work of the Council. In this regard, it is anticipated that at the forthcoming resumed session in July, the Council will assess its progress and consider and adopt a revised roadmap to guide its remaining work as it approaches the endpoint agreed in 2022.

### ***Updates on exploration activities carried out in the Area***

Let me now provide the meeting with a brief update on the general status of activities in the Area.

There are currently 30 active exploration projects worldwide, in the form of plans of work approved by the Authority. Sixteen of these are in the prime nodule region of the Clarion Clipperton Zone, five in the Indian Ocean, and five in the Western Pacific. In January this year, the Authority received two new applications for approval of plans of work for exploration from India – both for areas in the Indian Ocean – which are

currently under consideration by the Legal and Technical Commission. In due time, the Commission will issue its recommendations to the Council.

It is useful to recall that the first contracts with the Authority were granted in 2001, although the former registered pioneer investors had already conducted exploration programmes since the 1980s under the interim regime of resolution II. We can say, therefore, that exploration of the Area has been continuing for almost 40 years. During that time an enormous quantity of scientific data have been collected and our collective understanding of deep ocean geology and ecology has significantly improved as a result. At the same time, our ability to interpret and use these data has improved as ocean technology has developed.

The continued commitment of contractors to diligently carry out their contractual obligations under their contracts and even to increase the pace of exploration activities is an important sign of their confidence in the international regime established by Part XI and the 1994 Agreement. Several contractors have now reached the stage of testing of various components of mining and collecting systems, with positive results.

Another important area of progress in 2023 was the decision by the Council to establish the position of Interim Director-General of the Enterprise within the Secretariat. Following an international recruitment process, Mr. Eden Charles, of Trinidad and Tobago, was appointed to this position and will present his first report to the Council in July 2024.

### ***Update on the financial status of the Authority***

Mr. President, I will now address, as is customary at this meeting, the financial status of the Authority.

I wish to inform States Parties that, as of 31 May 2024, 61 per cent of the value of contributions to the 2024 budget due from States and the European Union had been received. Outstanding contributions from member States for prior periods (1998–2023) amounted to \$551,359. This is a low figure by historical standards, and I am sincerely grateful to all those States Parties that have made efforts to clear outstanding arrears.

I am particularly pleased to report that the Authority collected 97 per cent of assessed contributions due in 2023. This is not only in line with the track record over the past five years, but is also a clear demonstration of the interest of States Parties in supporting the work of the Authority.

Unfortunately, as of now, there are 38 States Parties that are in arrears of contributions for two years or more and thus potentially subject to Article 184 of the Convention. Information on these States Parties has been transmitted to the President of the Assembly in document ISBA/29/A/7.

I urge all States Parties to pay their outstanding contributions without delay.

One point I should mention is that the voluntary trust fund for the participation of members of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee is completely exhausted, despite recent

contributions made by the Philippines, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and three contractors, and a new commitment from the Netherlands. As things stand, there may not be sufficient funds available to support the participation of all eligible members in the next meeting of the Commission. I therefore make a special appeal to States Parties to come forward and contribute to the fund so that we can have a full and meaningful participation in the session.

Mr President,

The work and mandate of the Authority extends far beyond the formulation of rules, regulations and procedures to ensure the responsible and sustainable use of deep-sea mineral resources as permitted by the Convention and the 1994 Agreement.

Therefore, I now wish to move on to comment on the implementation of other parts of the Authority's mandate over the stewardship of the Area and its resources, particularly with respect to the promotion and encouragement of marine scientific research in the Area, the transfer of technology and scientific knowledge to developing States, and capacity development.

In the interests of time, I will highlight recent developments with respect to just three aspects of our work.

### **Marine Scientific Research in the Area**

The first is in relation to implementing the global agenda for deep-sea research contained in the Action Plan for Marine Scientific Research in support of the Ocean Decade adopted by the Assembly in 2020.

Since adopting the MSR Action Plan, the Secretariat has organised 29 events to promote deep-sea research, including workshops, webinars, information series, and side events in global fora, involving over 1,000 experts. Additionally, 44 strategic partnerships were forged to deliver the MSR Action Plan, and 19 Member States and the European Union have provided financial or in-kind support to the strategic research priorities under the Plan.

Among the knowledge products produced, five ISA Technical Studies have been delivered.

In May 2023, the “*One Thousand Reasons*” campaign awarded ten grants to eight research institutions and two citizen scientists to describe nearly 100 deep sea species by the end of 2024. A species checklist was launched in July 2023 in collaboration with the World Register of Marine Species (WoRMS). It currently comprises data on 285 species found in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone.

The Secretariat organized several workshops with different partners on data sharing, establishing best practices for data standardization, enhancing the interoperability of data contained in DeepData, novel taxonomic techniques, and to develop a scientific approach for identifying key deep-sea data relevant to environmental impact assessments and monitoring programmes.

In September 2023, on the margins of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit, here in New York, I launched a global call for action to accelerate progress under the 2030 Agenda in the areas of deep-sea research, technology and innovation.

This call for action aims at advancing collective action around four key priorities: (i) increasing investments in science and technology, (ii) aligning relevant research agendas with the MSR Action Plan as the global deep-sea research agenda, (iii) promoting deep-sea literacy, and (iv) leveraging the Authority's experiences in support of the implementation of the new 2023 implementing agreement under the Convention.

I am grateful to Argentina, Bangladesh, Cook Islands, Fiji, Jamaica, Malta, Mauritius, Nauru, Norway, Singapore, Tonga, and the UK for so far joining the call for action and I look forward to seeing more support in the coming weeks.

### **Capacity Development**

The second aspect of the work of the Authority that I would like to emphasise is in relation to capacity development.

A great deal of progress has been made in the implementation of the capacity development strategy of the Authority adopted in 2022. Since 1994, more than 1,000 individuals have benefited from capacity development initiatives implemented by the Authority. The activities that have been developed in recent years have been informed by the capacity needs assessment undertaken in 2020 and we are extremely proud of the results achieved.

The nomination of National Focal Points for capacity development plays a very important role in that regard, both in disseminating information about capacity development opportunities as well as in providing feedback to the Secretariat. I express my appreciation to the 60 States that have so far appointed a National Focal Point and I encourage others to join this group and participate in the regular meetings that are held.

This year, the Authority launched several important new initiatives.

In January this year, we opened the first ever Joint Training and Research Centre for Africa and the Middle East, in Alexandria, Egypt.

Just last month, I had the pleasure to open the first ever African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy, hosted by Cameroon at its Diplomatic Academy in Yaounde.

Both of these initiatives were led by the African Group in the Authority and represent the culmination of many years of hard work.

Similarly, two weeks ago, I was delighted to launch a new partnership with the Caribbean Region in the margins of the Fourth International Conference on SIDS, hosted by the Centre of Excellence for the Blue Economy at the University of the West Indies campus in Antigua and Barbuda.

The progress we have made in capacity development has been significantly boosted by the establishment of the ISA Partnership Fund, approved by the Assembly in 2022. I am pleased to inform you that in one year, the Partnership Fund has allocated more than \$1 million to 11 different projects to advance the global deep-sea research agenda, enhance women's empowerment and leadership in deep-sea research, and to build the capacity of developing States, particularly LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, in Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean.

I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the contributions to the Partnership Fund made by Greece, Mexico, France, Monaco, the Russian Federation and Spain.

I am also pleased to inform that in July 2023, the Authority launched **Deep Dive**, its new e-learning platform dedicated to addressing legal, technical and scientific aspects of the regime set out in the Convention and the 1994 Agreement. This platform aims to enhance the capacity of government officials and practitioners from States Parties, young graduates, personnel of partner institutions, and other stakeholders. We have been overwhelmed by the positive feedback received so far from our first two cohorts of Deep Divers and I wish to warmly thank all the international experts and practitioners who have contributed to this unique knowledge platform.

The third aspect of our work that I wish to highlight is our ongoing commitment to advancing women's empowerment and leadership in ocean affairs and deep-sea research, particularly women scientists from LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. The primary vehicle for our efforts in this regard is the Women in Deep-Sea Research (WIDSR) project implemented jointly with UN-OHRLLS and supported by more than 30 different partners.

Since its launch in 2021, over 100 women have benefited from various WIDSR training initiatives, including the contractors' training programme.

In 2024, we launched the 12-month mentoring programme under WIDSR called See Her Exceed (S.H.E.). This programme has been designed to address the underrepresentation of women from developing States in marine deep-sea science by stimulating their personal and professional development to enhance their career opportunities. The mentors, senior and experienced professionals, all volunteers, are world-renowned experts in their respective fields. They have been matched with women scientists from 8 different LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

Mr. President,

Before I conclude, I would like to reiterate the commitment of the Authority to contribute to the objectives set out in the latest implementing agreement under the Convention for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions through inter-agency cooperation and coordination.

Building on 30 years of experience and practice in effectively regulating activities in the Area and managing the common heritage of humankind, the Authority stands ready to bring its added value to support the implementation of the Agreement.

It is in this spirit that I have commissioned an independent report on the contribution of the Authority to the new agreement, which we will have the pleasure to launch tomorrow (room 5) and I hope to see many of us in the room. I would be remiss not to acknowledge the remarkable engagement and inputs received from all the members of the Group of Experts established to drive this process, many of whom played a leading role in the development and adoption of the 2023 Agreement.

### ***Final remarks***

This year, as we celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Authority, the strength and importance of the Convention and its institutions in providing a rules-based order for the seas and oceans that ensure peace, security, and international cooperation has never been so strong and yet so fragile at the same time.

The regime for the deep seabed beyond national jurisdiction provides the best example yet seen of effective multilateral management of shared space. It has taken many decades to reach where we are today and there seems no reason now to deviate from the evolutionary approach that has been consistently applied since 1994. The most important task of the Authority is to complete the regulatory framework for deep sea mining in a timely and responsible manner. This is also the best guarantee for the effective protection of the marine environment.

I would like to express my most sincere gratitude and thanks to the staff of the Secretariat of the Authority whose commitment, integrity and dedication for the work and mandate of this unique organization deserve to be acknowledged and commended. Their professionalism and resilience at a time when extreme political pressure is placed on the Authority and its personnel reflects highly on the ability of these individuals to diligently discharge their duties for the common good. My admiration for them and my faith in them have never been so high and I thank all States Parties which have expressed their support for the very hard tasks assumed by the Secretariat over time.

Thank you.

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