



# Assembly

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English only

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## Twenty-ninth session

Kingston, 29 July–2 August 2024

### **Statement by the President on the work of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority at its twenty-ninth session**

1. The twenty-ninth session of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority was held at Kingston, Jamaica from 29 July to 2 August 2024. On the day of 1 August in celebration of Emancipation Day in Jamaica, the host country of the Authority, there was no meeting of the Assembly.

#### **I. Adoption of the agenda**

2. At its 207<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 29 July 2024, the Assembly adopted its agenda for the twenty-ninth session (ISBA/29/A/1).

#### **II. Election of the President and Vice-Presidents of the Assembly**

3. At the 207<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 29 July 2024, His Excellency Amara Sowa (Sierra Leone), the head of delegation from which the President of the twenty-eighth session was elected, presided as Temporary President pursuant to rule 27 until the election of his successor, as consultations were ongoing for the nomination of a candidate for the presidency from the Eastern European States for the twenty-ninth session.

4. At the 207<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 29 July 2024, the representatives of Nauru (Asia-Pacific States), Portugal (Western European and Other States), and Dominican Republic (Latin American and Caribbean States) were elected Vice-Presidents of the Assembly for the twenty-ninth session.

#### **III. Appointment and report of the Credentials Committee**

5. At its 207<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Assembly appointed a Credentials Committee consisting of the following members: Brazil, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Switzerland and South Africa.

6. The Credentials Committee met on 31 July and on 2 August 2024 and elected Mr Carl Grainger (Ireland) as its Chair. The Committee examined the credentials of representatives participating in the twenty-ninth session as well as proxy voting documents.

7. At the 213<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 2 August, the Chair of the Credentials Committee presented the report of the Committee (see ISBA/29/A/10/Rev.1), which was approved by the Assembly at the same meeting with the oral revisions proposed by its Chairman. The decision of the Assembly relating to credentials is contained in document ISBA/29/A/12.

#### **IV. Requests for observer status in the Assembly**

8. At the 207<sup>th</sup> meeting, in accordance with rule 82, paragraph 1 (e) of the rules of procedure of the Assembly and the guidelines for observer status of non-governmental organizations with the Authority, the Assembly considered 16 applications for observer status from the following applicants: Tetiaroa Society; Gujarat National Law University; CSA Ocean Sciences Inc.; Institut du développement durable et des relations internationales; The Administrative Center for China's Agenda 21; American Samoa Economic Development Council; New World Hope Organization; Centre for Community & Oceanic Law; Opes Oceani Foundation, Inc.; British Institute for International and Comparative Law; National Oceanography Centre; Maui Nui Makai Network; Center for Biological Diversity; Impossible Metals Inc.; Seafloor Mineral Developers Association; Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental A.C. The Assembly granted observer status to all but to Impossible Metals Inc. and Seafloor Mineral Developers Association.

#### **V. Fifth edition of the Secretary-General's Award for Excellence in Deep-Sea Research**

9. At an informal meeting, on 29 July 2024, the Secretary-General presented the fifth edition of his Award for Excellence in Deep-Sea Research to Rengaiyan Periasamy, from India, a young project scientist at the National Center for Polar and Ocean Research in India, for his significant contribution to understanding and monitoring the global deep-sea ecosystems. The Secretary-General expressed his gratitude to the Government of Monaco for its continuing contribution in support of the Award since its inception and welcomed the contribution from Loke CCZ in offering a berth on an exploration cruise in 2026.

10. The delegation of Monaco congratulated Dr. Periasamy and reiterated the continued commitment of Monaco to the initiative, as well as to the promotion and encouragement of scientific research in the Area to support the protection and preservation of the marine environment. The representative of India expressed appreciation for the recognition of Dr Periasamy's efforts and acknowledged the significance of the Award for his future career. The Assembly also congratulated Dr. Periasamy on receiving the Award.

#### **VI. Annual report of the Secretary-General**

11. At the 207<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 29 July 2024, the Secretary-General presented his annual report, submitted in accordance with article 166, paragraph 4, of the Convention, comprising an official document (ISBA/29/A/2) and an illustrated publication entitled "Leading precautionary and responsible governance of the ocean global commons based on science, solidarity and transparency". Under the same agenda item, the Secretary-General also reported on the arrears (ISBA/29/A/7) and reported on the implementation of the action plan of the International Seabed Authority in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (ISBA/29/A/5).

12. The Secretary-General opened his presentation by welcoming San Marino as the next 170<sup>th</sup> member of the Authority and stressed the increased commitment of Member States to the Authority, as also confirmed by the growing number of Permanent Missions accredited to the Authority.

13. During the 208<sup>th</sup>, 209<sup>th</sup>, 210<sup>th</sup>, 211<sup>th</sup>, on 29 and 30 and 31 July 2024, the Assembly conducted a general debate on the reports of the Secretary-General. 2 regional groups, 53 members of the Authority and 15 observers made statements, in addition to one joint statement by Pacific Island States. Statements were also made by the President of Palau, H.E. Surangel S Whipps Jr, the President of the Republic of Nauru, H.E. David Adeang, the Minister of Climate Change Adaptation, Meteorology and Geo-Hazard, Energy, Environment and Disaster Management of the Republic of Vanuatu, Hon. Ralph Regenvanu, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica, H.E. Sheila Sealy Monteith, the Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands Mr Sonny Williams, and the Minister of Environment of Bahamas, H.E. Vaughn Miller.

14. Several delegations commented on the number of members who have provided information pursuant to article 84 of the Convention and recalled the importance of the establishment of the limits of the continental shelf to determine the geographical scope of the mandate of the Authority.

15. The majority of delegations commended the Secretary-General for the comprehensive report, noting that, this provides a thorough overview of the work carried out by the Authority in line with the strategic directions and associated outputs outlined in the strategic plan and the high-level action plan of the Authority.

16. Most delegations welcomed the increase in membership of the Authority with the accession of San Marino to the Convention and the 1994 Agreement. They expressed their strong commitment to the integrity of the Convention and the 1994 Agreement as the overarching legal and normative basis for all activities carried out in the marine environment. Many delegations stressed the important role of the Authority in the global ocean governance and its role as steward of the Area and its resources. In celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the establishment of the Authority, many delegations highlighted its continuing relevance in ensuring the effective and sustainable administration of the Area and its resources as the common heritage of humankind, while ensuring the protection of the marine environment.

17. Delegations noted the progress made by the Council in the development of the draft regulations on exploitation and welcomed the advancements made by the Council on the first reading of the consolidated text of the regulations.

18. Several delegations reiterated that contracts for exploitation should not be granted until a robust legal regime, including adequate measures for the protection of the marine environment, an inspection mechanism and a system for sharing the benefits from activities in the Area had been agreed upon.

19. Many delegations emphasised the Authority's contribution to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, noting that it had already contributed to 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and, in particular, to Goal 14 on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources. Delegations further welcomed the support of the Authority for the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and the advancements made under the Action Plan adopted by the Authority. Several delegations recognised the importance of the Global Call for Action to ensure the stewardship of the Area and its resources for the

benefit of all humanity through science, technology and innovation launched during a side event organised by the Authority and co-sponsored by Argentina and Bangladesh on the margins of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit held in New York in September 2023 and invited other Members of the Authority to join it.

20. Many delegations commended the active participation and representation of the Authority in the process leading to the adoption of an internationally legally binding instrument on marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdictions. In that regard, many delegations welcomed the report commissioned by the Secretary-General on the contribution of the Authority to the agreement.

21. Some delegations acknowledged with appreciation the Authority's contribution to other global and regional processes, such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, as well as the continued productive and positive cooperation with United Nations agencies and organizations.

22. Several delegations highlighted the importance of ensuring that the legal mandate assigned to different organizations responsible for the protection and sustainable use of the marine environment was respected pursuant to the specific responsibilities recognized by the Convention, the 1994 Agreement and specific regional treaties in order to avoid overlap and enhance coordination among them. At the same time, and without prejudice to the relevant and applicable decision-making processes, some delegations recognised the merit for the Authority to cooperate with other organisations and framework that contribute to the global management of the ocean, to ensure the effective protection of the marine environment.

23. The majority of delegations congratulated Mr Eden Charles on his appointment as Interim Director-General of the Enterprise. In recognising the key role played by the Enterprise in the architecture of the Authority, many delegations emphasised its significance in facilitating the participation of developing States in activities in the Area.

24. Some delegations also highlighted the importance of making progress on the operationalization of the Economic Planning Commission.

25. A number of delegations expressed appreciation for the continued contributions from member States and stakeholders to the voluntary trust funds, which are essential for ensuring the full participation and representation of developing States in the meetings of the Authority. Several delegations invited States that are in a position to contribute to such funds, to do that.

26. Delegations also called upon member States in arrears with their assessed contributions to pay those arrears as soon as possible and urged the Secretary-General to continue actively engaging with these member States.

27. Delegations welcomed the progress made under the International Seabed Authority Partnership Fund with the endorsement of several projects that are in line with the objectives to promote and encourage the conduct of marine scientific research for the benefit of humankind as a whole and to develop the capacities of developing States members of the Authority, in particular, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. In light of the significance of the projects carried out with the financial support of the Fund, including those announced by the Secretary-General to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Authority, delegations encouraged other member States, observers and other stakeholders to donate to the Fund.

28. Most delegations commended the work and efforts invested by the Authority in enhancing the capacity of developing States in line with the key result areas set out in the capacity development strategy adopted in 2022. Many noted that between July 2023 and June 2024 more than 230 individuals from 62 countries had benefited from at least one capacity-building or capacity-development activity implemented by the Authority. Delegations expressed appreciation for the number of trainees in the contractor training programme (139 over the reporting period) and commended the contractors that pledged to provide half of their trainings to women.

29. Several delegations welcomed the launch of the alumni network of former trainees to serve as a pool of knowledge for developing States. Many delegations also praised the launch of “Deep Dive”, the e-learning platform of the Authority, as a new mechanism to build and develop the capacities of developing States. Many delegations expressed appreciation for the comprehensive programme of lectures available on Deep Dive and encouraged the Secretariat to continue expanding this initiative.

30. Several delegations noted with appreciation specific projects implemented to address the specific needs identified by developing States and members of the Authority, in particular, the Africa Deep Seabed Resources project jointly implemented by the African Union and the Authority, with the support of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation; and the Abyssal Initiative for Blue Growth implemented jointly by the Authority and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, with the support of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. Some delegations highlighted the need to continue working on such projects to build and strengthen the capacity of developing Member States of the Authority.

31. Other delegations also welcomed the progress made by the International Seabed Authority-China Joint Training and Research Centre in advancing the activities carried out in partnership with the United Nations Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries, that included the deployment of two experts from Tanzania and Nepal to the Secretariat in 2024.

32. Many delegations commended the personal commitment of the Secretary-General to advancing women’s empowerment and leadership in ocean affairs, including in deep-sea research and through the Impact Group on Research and Oceans for Women established in June 2022 through the International Gender Champions network. Several delegations expressed appreciation for the success of the measures taken to promote gender parity among secretariat staff, including by reaching gender parity in senior professional roles.

33. Delegations specifically underscored the significant progress and outcomes of the Women in Deep-Sea Research project as a vital initiative to address the underrepresentation of women in deep-sea science and related disciplines. Many delegations acknowledged the significant advancements made under “See Her Exceed”, the first-ever global mentoring programme aimed at women scientists from developing States and, in particular, those from least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. Several delegations requested the Secretariat to expand the mentoring network.

34. Many delegations welcomed the increase in collaboration and strategic partnerships established between the Authority and national, regional and international organizations, noting with appreciation the increased number of partnerships

established with research organizations in developing States. Several delegations recognized with appreciation the cooperative arrangement between the Authority and the International Hydrographic Organization as well as the closer relations with DOALOS on matters related to the future entry into force of the Agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. Delegations urged the Authority to further promote and encourage the advancement of marine scientific research in the Area and the transfer of technology to support equal and effective participation in the activities of the Authority by developing States in all regions.

35. Several delegations noting with appreciation advancements under initiatives and projects such as the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative and the SMARTX project.

36. Several delegations expressed satisfaction with the overall achievement of the Authority under each strategic direction despite the limited financial and human resources and stressed that it was operating in an inclusive and transparent manner. Some delegations expressed satisfaction for the increased geographical representation in the staff of the Secretariat and other noted that more work needs to be carried out in the context of the transfer of marine technology to developing countries.

37. Some delegations further noted with appreciation that an evolutionary approach is being applied to the creation organs of the Authority and stressed the need for considering the operationalisation of the Economic Planning Commission.

38. During the consideration of the annual report of the Secretary-General, several delegations made statements of a general nature. Several delegations expressed their national positions on deep seabed mining and the need to ensure robust regulatory frameworks for the protection of the marine environment, prior to the approval of any plan of work for exploitation. Several delegations stressed the need to ensure that, as a package deal, the Convention is upheld and implemented as a whole. In this context, many delegations also recognised the important role of the Authority in the ocean governance architecture.

## **VII. Adoption of the extended high-level action plan of the International Seabed Authority for the period 2019–2025**

39. During the previous session, the Assembly decided that the 2019-2023 strategic plan of the International Seabed Authority be extended by two years and consequently requested that the Secretary-General review the high-level action plan for the extended period 2019–2025 for alignment with the extension of the strategic plan for the same extended period. An extended high-level action plan for the period 2019-2025 is proposed for consideration and adoption by the Assembly (see ISBA/29/A/8). This extension has no bearing on the substance of the high-level action as only initially specific agreed timeframes have been adjusted in light of progress in the implementation of relevant action items.

40. At its 214<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 2 August, the Assembly adopted the extended high-level plan for the Authority for the period 2019–2025 as provided in the annex to document ISBA/29/A/8.

## **VIII. Periodic review of the international regime of the Area pursuant to article 154 of the Convention**

41. During the previous session, 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 in 2024, with a view to adopting a decision thereon (ISBA/28/A/16). The Assembly also requested the Finance Committee to consider and provide recommendations to the Assembly on the budgetary implications pertaining to the undertaking of a second periodic review. Such recommendations are contained in the report of the Finance Committee (ISBA/29/A/9-ISBA/29/C/20).

42. Divergent views were expressed on the undertaking of a second periodic review of the international regime of the Area pursuant to article 154 of the Convention. Several delegations stressed that the language of article 154 makes the review mandatory. Several delegations considered that this was premature and would place a heavy financial and resource burden on the secretariat while the priority is the adoption of the Regulations on exploitation of mineral resources in the Area. A call for a pragmatic approach was also made under these circumstances, including for finding alternative approaches through the strategic plan for the Authority.

43. At its 214<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 2 August 2024, the Assembly deferred consideration of the question of the periodic review to the thirtieth session.

## **IX. Report of the interim Director-General of the Enterprise**

44. At its 214<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 2 August 2024, the Assembly received with appreciation the first report of the newly recruited interim Director-General for the Enterprise (ISBA/29/A/6-ISBA/29/C/12). Delegations supported the ongoing activities and efforts of the interim Director-General and emphasised the vital role of the Enterprise for the participation of developing states in activities in the Area and for their access to benefits from such activities. The interim Director-General was encouraged to monitor the continuously evolving technology not only for exploitation but also for the protection of the marine environment.

## **X. Adoption of the budget of the Authority**

45. At its 211<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 31 July 2024, the Assembly considered the budget, as proposed by the Secretary-General (ISBA/29/A/3/Add.1-ISBA/29/C/11/Add.1) and recommended by the Finance Committee (ISBA/29/A/9-ISBA/29/C/20) and the Council (ISBA/29/C/21). At the same meeting, the Assembly adopted a decision relating to the budget of the International Seabed Authority for the financial period 2025–2026 (ISBA/29/A/11).

## **XI. General policy of the Authority for the protection and preservation of the marine environment**

46. As requested by note verbale dated 19 April 2024 from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Chile to the International Seabed Authority, the item “Proposal for a general policy of the Authority for the protection and preservation of the marine environment” has been included on the provisional agenda of the twenty-ninth session of the Assembly (ISBA/29/A/4). A proposal for a general policy on the protection and preservation of the marine environment was submitted by several countries, including Brazil, Costa Rica, France, Germany, Ireland, Palau, Switzerland and Vanuatu (ISBA/29/A/4).

47. While recognizing the importance of ensuring the effective protection of the marine environment from harmful effects that may be caused by activities in the Area, many delegations raised concerns about the aim of the policy (sustainable use of minerals versus moratorium), timing, procedure, budgetary implications, consistency with Part XI of the Convention, and overlap with other priorities currently under way by the Council, including the development and adoption of the draft exploitation regulations for minerals of the Area.

48. At its 214<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 2 August, the Assembly did not reach a consensus on the proposal and its revisions following consultations over the week. The Assembly further decided not to defer consideration of this question in its agenda for the thirtieth session.

## **XII. Statement by the President of the Council on the work of the Council during the twenty-ninth session**

49. At its 212<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 31 July 2024, the Assembly took note of the statement of the President of the Council on the work of the Council during the twenty-ninth session (ISBA/29/C/9 and Add.1).

## **XIII. Election of the Secretary-General, in accordance with article 166, paragraph 2, of the Convention**

50. The Assembly was invited to elect the Secretary-General from among the two candidates proposed by the Council (ISBA/29/C22). The Assembly decided to proceed with a formal vote for the election pursuant to rules 72 and 73 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly.

51. The Assembly noted that Bolivia, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Liberia and Senegal had communicated their wish to exercise their voting rights pursuant to article 184 of the Convention.

52. In the absence of a consensus, the Assembly decided not to authorize those States to exercise their voting rights but requested that the Finance Committee define criteria and process for the assessment of the conditions to allow the Assembly to exercise its discretionary functions under article 184 of the Convention.

53. At its 213<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 2 August 2024, the Assembly elected Ms Leticia Carvalho (Brazil) for a four year-term from 1 January 2025 until 31 December 2028 (ISBA/29/A/13).

## **XIV. Election to fill the vacancies on the Council, in accordance with article 161, paragraph 3, of the Convention**

54. At its 214<sup>th</sup> meeting, on 2 August 2024, the Assembly adopted a decision relating to the election of 18 members to fill vacancies on the Council for a four-year term from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2028 (ISBA/29/A/14).

## **XV. Dates of the next session of the Assembly**

55. The thirtieth session of the Assembly will be held in Kingston from 21 to 25 July 2025. It will be the turn of the Latin American and Caribbean States group to nominate a candidate for the presidency of the Assembly.