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STATEMENT

By

H.E. Mr. Michael W. Lodge

Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

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Mr. President

Thank you for the opportunity to address the United Nations General Assembly on behalf of the International Seabed Authority.

On 31 December, my mandate as Secretary-General of the Authority ends.

As this is my final address to the Assembly in this capacity, I wish to take the opportunity to reflect on our collective work over the past eight years.

I was elected in 2016 with the initial mandate to implement the recommendations from the first periodic review of the international regime for the Area. This review, conducted between 2015 and 2017, was overseen by a review committee chaired by former ITLOS judge and Ambassador Helmut Tuerk of Austria.

Of the nineteen recommendations of the review committee adopted by the Assembly, fourteen were directed at me as Secretary-General.

I am pleased to say that, with your unwavering support, we implemented each one of those recommendations.

Let me highlight some of the key achievements during my tenure:

- In 2018, the Authority adopted its first ever five-year Strategic Plan, now extended to 2025.
- The Secretariat, unchanged since 1996, has been reformed and revitalised to respond to the current needs of the Authority, whilst ensuring maximum efficiency and accountability.
- We have witnessed a significant increase in the participation of member States, including developing States, in the Authority's work. We introduced a more efficient and cost-effective programme of meetings to facilitate this broader engagement.
- The fundamental importance of the Authority's mandate to promote and coordinate marine scientific research in the Area and to disseminate related knowledge for the benefit of all States Parties has been recognized and prioritized through an Action Plan for Marine Scientific Research in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.
- The Authority has fundamentally changed how it supports its membership in developing countries. We adopted a Capacity Development Strategy and opened regional and national training and research centres in China, Egypt, and Cameroon as well as a Centre of Excellence in Antigua and Barbuda. Dedicated actions were implemented to support and enhance the participation of women in deep sea research activities.
- The Authority's financing has been transformed. The regular budget has been increased from \$7.8m annually in 2016 to \$13.2m in 2025. Extra-budgetary funding of \$2.2 million has been raised and implemented cost recovery for key services.
- The Enterprise has been operationalised through the establishment of the position of Interim Director-General within the Secretariat.
- In collaboration with the Finance Committee, and as recommended by the review committee, the Secretariat has produced ground-breaking economic studies and analyses on the equitable sharing of financial benefits deriving from activities in the Area, culminating in a proposal for a Common Heritage Fund.
- The Secretariat supported the development of critical measures for the protection of the marine environment aligned with the mandate of the Authority under the Convention and the 1994 Agreement. We reviewed and strengthened the environmental management plan for the Clarion Clipperton Zone (CCZ) and supported scientific work to develop Regional Environmental Management Plans in the Northern mid-Atlantic Ridge, in the Indian Ocean and in the Northwest Pacific Ocean. Over 450 experts from 55 countries, including representatives of other international organisations, have been engaged in this work over the past five years.

These are not merely achievements of the Authority, but achievements of all of you. They might not all be reflected in a resolution, no matter how comprehensive, but their recognition and celebration are crucial.

Mr. President

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Authority. The Convention and its institutions provide a rules-based order for the seas and oceans ensuring peace, security, and international cooperation. However, multiple threats challenge this order.

The 1994 Agreement paved the way for developed States to join the Convention, enabling the three institutions established under the Convention to become functional and effective. The G77 made significant sacrifices and concessions on key elements fundamental to their interests during this process.

They did so for the common good and in the spirit of multilateralism.

The 1994 Agreement established a new bargain.

It protected the interests of States Parties, mainly developed countries, who wished to pursue activities in the Area by allowing those activities to proceed in a precautionary manner, under the supervision of the Authority.

Simultaneously, it embedded an evolutionary approach where States agreed to work in good faith to establish a complete regulatory framework for activities in the Area in line with the pace of development of those activities. This faith in multilateralism guided the negotiation and adoption of three sets of regulations for exploration for different resources, bringing us to where we are today.

Thanks to the stability and predictability introduced by those regulations, the pace of development of activities in the Area has continued to increase throughout my tenure.

I have had the honour to sign contracts for exploration with three new contractors since 2017, all of which were concluded in the manner and form provided under the Convention and the 1994 Agreement. Another plan of work for exploration was approved this year and I congratulate India on this achievement, even though this important development is not recognized in the draft resolution before the Assembly today.

Many exploration contracts are now reaching maturity, with contractors expected to proceed to exploitation in line with the provisions of the Convention.

This presents a challenge for States Parties who must decide collectively, through the Council of the Authority, how to balance protection and preservation of the marine environment with the interest in exploitation of seabed mineral resources.

The Council's responsibility is to finalize the regulatory framework in a timely and responsible manner. This is the best guarantee for the effective protection of the marine environment and defending against unilateral approaches. Without the adoption of a rules-based regime for the exploitation of mineral resources of the Area, the widely accepted and fundamental principles of the common heritage of humankind could be undermined.

It is critical for the integrity of the regime for the deep seabed beyond national jurisdiction that the Council now completes the task before it.

Notwithstanding discussions by States concerning the exploitation of marine mineral resources in various other intergovernmental forums, the Area and its resources are the common heritage of humankind and

activities in the Area shall be organized, carried out and controlled by States Parties to the Convention through the Authority. In this regard, the jurisdiction of the Authority is an exclusive one.

Mr. President,

As I leave the Authority, I express satisfaction that I leave behind an institution that is fit for purpose, and that has navigated the challenges of an ever-changing international environment.

I have strived to ensure that developing countries, especially the least developed, play a greater role in assisting the Authority to deliver its crucial mandate: to ensure that activities in the Area are conducted for the benefit of humankind as a whole.

Not everything I hoped for has been achieved.

Regulations for exploitation of marine mineral resources remain incomplete. A new strategic plan for the Authority, setting out a shared understanding of its mission and objectives, is overdue. The Economic Planning Commission is yet to be established. While discussed, work on the implementation of Article 82 of the Convention, has not been completed. The Secretariat is not yet fully equipped or adequately resourced to manage the next phase of the Authority's existence.

The responsibility for taking these forward, and the consequences of failure, lies with the members of the Authority.

I firmly believe that the Convention and its rules for the conduct of all activities in the ocean represents humanity's best hope for our relationship with the oceans and seas. I have no doubt that the Authority will continue to grow in importance and stature. The adoption in March 2023 of the 2023 Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction further reinforces the Authority's mandate and functions as a central institution for global ocean governance and will no doubt bring added responsibilities.

Mr President

Let me now extend my deep appreciation to the States Parties for their constant support for the Authority's mandate and work. The active participation and constructive engagement of numerous delegations demonstrate the importance States Parties place on protecting the integrity of the Convention and its implementing agreements.

I would also like to extend a special word of gratitude and appreciation to the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea for their constant cooperation and support over the years.

Also to the current and former judges of the Tribunal over the past 30 years, thank you. You have nurtured the delicate relationship between the Authority and the Tribunal as creatures of the Convention, and, as personal friends and colleagues, have provided wisdom, support and advice.

My sincere gratitude goes to the staff of the Secretariat whose commitment, integrity and dedication to this unique organization deserve recognition and commendation. Their professionalism and resilience in the face of extreme political pressure reflect highly on their ability to diligently discharge their duties for the common good.

Finally, I extend special thanks to the Government and people of Jamaica. As long ago as the 1970s, this small island dared to have the ambition and vision to host an entirely new and inherently complex new organization. Jamaica has been a warm and generous host of the Authority and its international staff, imbuing in them the same qualities of resilience, creativity, confidence and faith in multilateralism that we recognize in Jamaica itself.

In the words of Kofi Annan when he made his final speech to the General Assembly from this podium, “Together we have pushed some big rocks to the top of the hill. Some have rolled back down again, but more remain at the top and we have built a mountain.”

From this mountaintop, we see what is possible and recognize the hopes and dreams of the architects of the Convention.

Thank you all for your support. I wish the Authority all the best for the future.
