



Inaugural Statement

Kingston, Jamaica

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STATEMENT

by

Ms. Leticia Reis de Carvalho

Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

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Excellencies, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to address you today as I assume the role of Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority (ISA). The trust and confidence placed in me by Member States from all regions inspire my unwavering commitment to serve this institution and humanity to the very best of my ability.

To the distinguished representatives of Member States, Permanent Missions, the dedicated ISA staff, members of the Legal and Technical Commission, the Finance Committee, ISA observers and contractors who contribute to our shared mission, I extend my gratitude for your continued dedication. Together, we will strengthen the ISA's foundation to ensure its ability to fulfil its mandate as a steward of humankind's common heritage.

I offer special thanks to our host country, Jamaica, whose steadfast support since 1994 has provided a home to ISA enabling international cooperation to flourish. As we mark the ISA's thirtieth anniversary, I acknowledge the warm welcome and continued partnership of the government and people of Jamaica, which remain central to our mission.

I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to Brazil for nominating me for this esteemed position. As a proud Brazilian, I bring with me the values of collaboration, resilience and progress that define our national identity. I am equally grateful to the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States for their invaluable support throughout my nomination, campaign and election.

It is a profound honour to be the first woman, first Latin American and first oceanographer in the ISA's history to serve as a Secretary-General. Together, we will embark on a new era defined by collaboration,

equity, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, effectiveness and sustainability—values that will guide our collective efforts to ensure ISA remains a trusted steward of the ocean.

We stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us, leaders who have made the ISA into the steadfast institution it is today. Their work, guided by the knowledge and circumstances of their times, laid the foundation upon which we will continue to build, adapting to new realities and embracing emerging opportunities for the benefit of all.

Reflecting on the words of Arvid Pardo, whose visionary 1967 speech at the United Nations General Assembly called for the governance of seabed resources beyond national jurisdiction, I am inspired by his assertion that “the dark oceans are the womb of life.” Recognized as the father of the Common Heritage Principle, Pardo’s legacy and vision continue to inspire our work today.

The deep seabed in the areas beyond national jurisdiction – the Area - encompassing over 54 per cent of our planet’s surface, falls under ISA’s mandate. This places a profound responsibility on the ISA for planetary good governance. Our mandate is clear: to organize and regulate activities in the Area in fulfilment of the Common Heritage Principle on behalf of States Parties and for the benefit of humankind as a whole. This includes a list of crucial responsibilities: sustainable resource management; environmental protection; equitable benefit-sharing; the promotion and encouragement of marine scientific research; and the dissemination of its results. These pillars guide our work to ensure that seabed resources are managed responsibly, equitably and in alignment with the highest evidence-based scientific and environmental standards.

The challenges we face are complex and evolving. The deep seabed is among Earth’s least explored frontiers, yet its ecosystems are critical for the health of the ocean and planet. Advances in science and technology—such as data analytics, remote sensing and deep-sea exploration tools offer unprecedented opportunities for discovery and sustainable development. However, these advances also demand robust governance, agility and inclusive, forward-thinking leadership.

As we expand our knowledge of the deep seabed, we must confront difficult questions that will shape the direction and legacy of our work. How can we responsibly extract value from the seabed without compromising its ecological functions? What information do we still need to avoid mistakes of the past that have left ecosystems depleted and communities disadvantaged? How can we chart a true course to best regulatory practices that ensure standards, thresholds, guidelines and equitable benefit-sharing? How can we access, undertake and leverage the best possible science in service of the ISA’s work?

To answer these questions, it is essential that we build consensus among States Parties and engage all stakeholders in the Common Heritage Principle, ensuring every voice is heard.

As a new ISA Secretary-General, I commit to neutrality and being faithful to the high standards demanded of my office. I commit to fostering open dialogue on the issues confronting us and to the building of strong partnerships among us all. I believe that the achievement of the ISA's mission depends on our ability to engage a broad spectrum of voices, including indigenous peoples, industry leaders, ISA contractors, local communities, NGOs, policymakers, scientists, youth. Together, we must ensure that the ISA embodies the spirit of multilateral cooperation, serving as a model for transparent, inclusive and science-driven governance.

Ocean diplomacy is central to my approach. In my first 100 days, I will focus on listening and learning to understand better the diverse priorities, needs, challenges and aspirations of our Member States and stakeholders. This foundation will guide informed decisions that reflect our collective goals and ensure that the Area remains a source of opportunity and shared prosperity for generations to come. I will also ensure that the upcoming first part of the ISA Council and Legal and Technical Commission are properly serviced and successfully delivered.

We must also acknowledge that the ISA now operates in a rapidly evolving multilateral ocean governance landscape. International agreements such as the emerging BBNJ Treaty set ambitious targets for conservation, resource use and equitable benefit-sharing, which relate directly to the ISA's work.

I believe ISA must rise to the challenge of changing times by responding to these new global goals, treaties and frameworks in a complementary manner while remaining firmly anchored to its mandate as defined under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This will require strengthening our operational capacity, fostering synergies with international partners and ensuring robust and responsive governance mechanisms.

To achieve this vision, we must act with urgency, determination, inclusivity and humility while tapping into all available scientific and technological resources at our disposal. The deep seabed is not merely a resource. It is a legacy entrusted to us in our time to protect and sustain for the good of future generations.

Anchored in these principles and values, together, we can build a stronger ISA, one that fulfils its mandate and inspires trust in the values that unite us as a global community.

Thank you.
