



**Lunch dialogue with delegations of observers to  
the International Seabed Authority**

**Kingston, Jamaica**

**27 March 2025**

STATEMENT

by

Madam Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority,  
Leticia Carvalho

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Good afternoon and thank you all for being here.

I want to start by acknowledging that we are meeting today in the Delegates' Dining Room and not at the Secretariat due to a temporary AC issue in the offices of the Authority. It is quite warm in there at the moment and we wanted to ensure your comfort, hence the change of venue. I very much look forward to welcoming you all properly to the offices of the Secretariat in the near future and making sure you feel at home at the Authority.

It is a privilege to open this dialogue with representatives of the observer delegations, including non-member states, organizations, many from civil society, environmental NGOs and community-based networks.

I want to recognize the essential role that you have played and continue to play in shaping global conversations on ocean protection, environmental stewardship and accountability in ocean governance. I want to reassure you now that this dialogue is not a one-off. I am deeply committed to engagement with observers, not only today but at every Council meeting moving forward. Your presence here matters. I want you to feel proud of your contributions and know that the Authority sees you as a valued allies in building an institution worthy of its mandate. You are a part of this house.

The Authority was created to ensure a peaceful, sustainable and equitable approach to governing the deep seabed beyond national jurisdiction and that is what I am committed to. As Arvid Pardo once said, "The deep seabed and its resources are the common heritage of (hu)mankind [...] This heritage must be reserved exclusively for peaceful purposes and administered by an international authority for the benefit of all peoples and of present and future generations." That principle remains central to the mission and the vision of the Authority as well.

The existence of the Authority is a testament to the belief that multilateral institutions can deliver equity, transparency and inclusion when functioning well. Without the Authority, we would not be here having this dialogue today. There would be no structure for consultation. No space for the participation of all states, no matter their condition, resources or development. No protection of the marine environment or safeguards. No regulatory checks. No shared vision.

Since taking office in January, I am committed to listening, learning and building the kinds of partnerships that are essential if we are to govern the deep seabed in a way that truly upholds the values enshrined in UNCLOS and the principle of the common heritage of humankind. This also implies upholding the rule of law. It implies grounding our decisions in science and evidence. And it implies ensuring that the Authority becomes a place where equity and inclusion are not only principles but also practices.

I recognize that the relationship between the observers and the Authority has not always felt open or inclusive. I also understand the deep concerns you bring regarding environmental risk, transparency and neutrality and the pace and direction of regulatory development. Let me be clear. My commitment is to transparency. To neutrality. To equity. And to science- and law-based governance that respects the rights and concerns of all people, especially those who have historically been excluded from these decisions.

This includes strengthening involvement and engagement with Indigenous Peoples and coastal communities who hold vital knowledge, cultural connections and custodial relationships with the ocean. It also includes considering underwater cultural heritage, recognizing that the deep seabed is not only a biological frontier but also a space rich in history and memory for many peoples. I want to acknowledge the time, resources and dedication it takes for you all to participate in these conversations. Your presence here and the expertise you bring are deeply valued.

As Secretary-General, I am committed to enabling your effective participation and to ensuring that your contributions are not only heard but actively considered by Member States. Many of the interventions I have heard from observers have enriched the debate, provided essential knowledge and introduced perspectives that are vital for Member States to contemplate. I will continue to elevate these contributions and encourage Member States to reflect on them.

As we commemorate the thirtieth year of the Authority, we must also confront the realities of the present moment. This includes scrutiny of our processes, acknowledgement of past shortcomings and a willingness to improve continuously.

The Authority has a clear mandate under UNCLOS to organize and control activities in the Area for the benefit of all humanity and to ensure effective protection of the marine environment. A robust regulatory framework is what gives structure to participation, triggers precaution and creates mechanisms for accountability.

We must uphold this responsibility. And we must ensure sound regulation through inclusive, science-based and consultative processes. We will not rush the process. It is legitimate, however, to explore ways to improve efficiency and make it more agile. Thorough and thoughtful deliberation is essential to secure a legacy of ocean governance that current and future generations will look upon with pride.

We must also continue to evolve within the global context honouring our obligations under UNCLOS while also ensuring that emerging global environmental goals, including those reflected in the BBNJ Treaty, OSPAR and the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework, are part of our collective awareness.

The risk of not developing regulations leaves the deep seabed open to unregulated and unilateral exploitation, which could have catastrophic consequences. We must develop a robust and protective regulatory system. I need your help to do that. The regime of the Area was created precisely to prevent the disastrous effects that the notion of freedom of the seas had long imposed on areas beyond national jurisdictions and their resources, as seen for many years in the high seas and the fisheries resources. We need your contributions to help shape regulations that align with UNCLOS and, most of all, with the nature of the Area as a common heritage of humankind. We need your expertise to strengthen environmental safeguards and ensure equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms.

These are essential elements of responsible governance. Your research, ideas, deep knowledge and expertise are crucial in getting this right. Help us uphold our mandate and strengthen our existing mechanisms, making them more inclusive and effective. I encourage you to use this dialogue to voice not only your concerns but also your solutions. We need your help identifying knowledge gaps and improving our collective scientific understanding of the deep ocean. What does bridging those gaps look like to you? We are listening.

This dialogue with observers is one of several engagements I am holding this week with the stakeholders of the Authority, including Sponsoring States and contractors. Every voice matters here. The Authority has space to grow and we must grow together, collectively. With your partnership, we can strengthen the role of the Authority as a guardian of shared stewardship, not just a regulator of seabed activity.

And I ask you to please help me change the perception of this institution. Help me champion the extraordinary mandate that makes the Authority unique: a multilateral body entrusted with safeguarding the common heritage of humankind. A place where nations came together and agreed that no one country and no corporation, no matter how powerful, should control the deep seabed for its own gain. Instead, its governance must serve all of humanity and protect the interests of future generations.

The Authority was designed as a place where decisions are made collectively, transparently and in the shared interest of all peoples, present and future. It should stand as a beacon of hope and a reminder of what is possible when multilateralism rises to meet the moment. Help me champion that to the world. At this juncture in the global scenario, we cannot afford for this institution to lose effectiveness and

legitimacy. As part of our thirtieth anniversary commemorations this year, I want to celebrate the diversity of voices shaping this institution.

I look forward to welcoming scientists, youth, local communities, Indigenous leaders and civil society at future events that reflect our shared mission and values.

Finally, I invite you to reach out and engage directly with the Secretariat. We welcome your questions, your ideas and your perspectives. This is a new chapter, one grounded in openness and the true spirit of the inclusive mandate of the Authority. My team and I are here, and we welcome you.

Thank you for being here. I look forward to our exchange.

Together, let's shape the future of the deep seabed wisely, justly and in the interests of all.