

Statement by the Delegation of Antigua and Barbuda

Delivered by H.E. Mr. Dwight C.R. Gardiner OBE GOM LLD (h.c.), Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda to the International Seabed Authority

Thirty-First Session of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority, July 2026

Agenda Item 9: Annual Report of the Secretary-General

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, good morning

Mr. President,

Antigua and Barbuda extends its warm congratulations to you and the members of the Bureau on your election and stewardship during this Thirty-First Session of the Assembly. We also express our profound gratitude to the Government and people of Jamaica for their warm hospitality and for continuing to serve as the gracious home of the International Seabed Authority. We also join others in welcoming the Republic of Kyrgyzstan and the Kingdom of Cambodia to the Authority.

Mr. President

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) on the frontlines of ocean governance, climate change, and marine stewardship, Antigua and Barbuda remains steadfast in its commitment to the legal framework established under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). We reaffirm our unyielding support for the foundational principle enshrined in Article 136, that the International Seabed Area and its resources are the common heritage of humankind.

Mr. President,

Our delegation welcomes the presentation of the Annual Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Article 166 of UNCLOS. Antigua and Barbuda commends Madame Secretary-General on her leadership. In particular, we welcome the Secretariat's integration with UN Common System standards notably through coordination with the UN Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT) and executive training partnerships with the UN System Staff College.

We also support further integration of the Authority into UN administrative, human resources and oversight programs where applicable in order to ensure the Authority remains aligned with broader UN system standards.

Mr. President we also welcome the further work undertaken by the Council during its recently concluded session. Antigua and Barbuda insists that any operational framework must be rooted

in strict precaution, robust science, and clear liability regimes before any commercial activity is considered.

Mr. President,

My delegation wishes to express its deep appreciation to the Legal and Technical Commission (LTC) for its unwavering diligence, expertise, and substantial achievements in managing an increasingly complex workload. We emphasize that the technical independence and impartiality of the LTC are essential to maintaining the integrity of the Authority's regulatory function.

We wish to highlight the following critical areas of the LTC's ongoing work:

The LTC's mandate in evaluating periodic contractor reports, monitoring exploratory progress, and enforcing strict compliance mechanisms is fundamental to ensuring accountability across all activities in the Area. A well resourced LTC is critical for the proper functioning of the Authority and Member States must give it the necessary resources for it to effectively carry out its mandate.

We commend the LTC's technical efforts to establish binding environmental threshold values, draft comprehensive standards and guidelines, and develop Regional Environmental Management Plans (REMPs) such as the operational progress made in the Indian Ocean. These mechanisms are vital to preventing harmful effects to marine ecosystems.

Given the technical demands placed on the Commission, we urge all Member States to ensure that their nominated LTC experts are granted the necessary time, institutional backing, and resources to participate fully in all sessions and working groups. We also encourage States and Observers who are in a position to do so, to donate to the voluntary trust fund which supports participation of LTC members from developing States.

Mr. President,

Sound financial governance and fiscal prudence are indispensable to the long-term sustainability, credibility, and independence of the International Seabed Authority.

Antigua and Barbuda supports the recommendations of the Finance Committee regarding the operational budgets of both the Secretariat and the Enterprise for the 2027–2028 biennium. We stress the necessity of strict financial discipline, transparent expenditure tracking, efficient resource allocation, and the timely implementation of approved operational programs.

In accordance with UNCLOS Articles 140(2) and 160(2), the mandate to ensure the equitable sharing of financial and economic benefits derived from the Area remains a priority. We welcome the Secretariat's concept note on the Common Heritage Fund, which serves as a basis for discussions to ensure developing countries, especially SIDS, derive meaningful economic benefit from the common heritage of humankind.

We also express our sincere appreciation to donor States contributing to the ISA Partnership Fund, which supports capacity development and scientific research projects, in particular for SIDS.

Mr. President

In closing Antigua and Barbuda reiterates its commitment to this organization and the importance of its work. We stand ready to work with all delegations and partners to advance our shared objectives. The world is looking to us to find solutions for some of the most pressing environmental concerns of the day and the Authority must continue to lead in a legally sound, future-proof and inclusive framework. We must always be guided by the principles equity and environmental justice in our deliberations as we determine the future of the common heritage of humankind.

Thank you, Mr. President.