



**Joint Benelux statement at the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority
'Annual report of the Secretary-General under article 166, paragraph 4, of the
Convention'**

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Benelux Statement

Delivered by:

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[Check against delivery]

Thank you, Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Benelux countries – Luxembourg, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and my own country, Belgium.

At the outset, the Benelux countries would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, for your election as the Assembly President. As three small countries for whom multilateralism is an essential part of our DNA, it is a great honour to see a representative of a Benelux country presiding over this Assembly.

We also express our sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General for her comprehensive report.

The Benelux countries remain committed and active participants in the work of the International Seabed Authority and continue to attach great importance to its mandate. As the organization entrusted under the Convention with organizing and regulating activities in the Area on behalf of humankind as a whole, the Authority plays a central role in ensuring that the common heritage of humankind is managed in a responsible, equitable and sustainable manner.

In that regard, we welcome the accession of Kyrgyzstan to the Convention and the ratification of the Convention by Cambodia. These are important

steps towards the universality of the legal framework established by UNCLOS.

Mr. President,

We welcome the Authority's efforts to engage with Member States and relevant organizations on its role in supporting the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement. Ensuring coherence and complementarity between the ISA regime and the BBNJ Agreement will be important for the future governance of areas beyond national jurisdiction. In this context, the Benelux countries recall Belgium's candidature to host the future BBNJ Secretariat in Brussels and reaffirm our commitment to supporting the effective implementation of the Agreement.

The Benelux countries further wish to commend the Authority for the progress achieved in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. We particularly welcome the fact that women now represent 55 per cent of Secretariat personnel and commend the Secretary-General for joining the International Gender Champions initiative in December 2025. These developments send an important signal and demonstrate the Authority's commitment to inclusive leadership. The Benelux is also pleased that Belgium was able to support these efforts through a contribution of 10,000 euro to the See Her Exceed programme.

The Benelux countries remain concerned, however, about the significant level of outstanding contributions and arrears. The Authority's ability to effectively discharge its mandate depends on a sound and predictable financial basis. We therefore encourage all member states to meet their financial obligations in a timely manner.

Mr. President,

The Benelux countries remain fully committed to the ongoing work towards the development of the Mining Code. We believe that discussions and negotiations should continue in a constructive and effective manner and lead to tangible progress in the period ahead.

At the same time, we wish to reiterate a fundamental point. All activities of exploration for, and exploitation of, the resources of the Area must take place within a robust international and multilateral regulatory framework, under the auspices of the International Seabed Authority. The Convention

and the 1994 Agreement provide the comprehensive legal framework within which all activities in the ocean and seas must be carried out, including activities in the seabed and its subsoil.

The Convention is clear in this regard. States Parties have the responsibility to ensure that activities in the Area carried out by them or by entities under their jurisdiction or control are conducted in conformity with Part XI of the Convention. Likewise, no State, natural person or juridical person may claim, acquire or exercise rights over the minerals of the Area except in accordance with the Convention. The Benelux countries therefore stress that any unilateral activities undertaken outside the framework established by the Convention and the Authority are incompatible with it.

In this context, we also wish to recall the fundamental importance of the principle of the Common Heritage of Humankind, which remains at the very heart of the regime governing the Area and its resources. We further underline the non-derogable character of Article 311, paragraph 6, of the Convention, which safeguards this principle and preserves the integrity of the legal framework carefully negotiated by States Parties.

Finally, the Benelux countries note that during last year's discussions it was indicated that information regarding the period from May to July 2024 would be reported in an annex to the present report. If we have understood correctly that this information has not yet been provided, we would welcome clarification on this point.

Mr. President,

Luxembourg, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Belgium thank the Secretary-General for her report and assure her of their continued support for the Authority and its important work.

I thank you.