



**SOUTH AFRICA'S INTERVENTION AT THE ISA ASSEMBLY
AGENDA ITEM 9. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL UNDER
ARTICLE 166, PARAGRAPH 4, OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON
THE LAW OF THE SEA (ISBA/31/A/2)**

28TH JULY 2026

South Africa aligns with the statement delivered by the delegation of Kenya on behalf of the African Group, and we will deliver the following additional remarks in our national capacity.

South Africa thanks the Secretary-General for her Annual Report under article 166, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, contained in document ISBA/31/A/2. We also express our appreciation to the Secretariat for the considerable efforts undertaken during the reporting period in supporting the work of the Authority, its organs and subsidiary bodies.

Mr. President,

South Africa has carefully considered the report and notes the extensive activities undertaken in the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. The report reflects a period of significant institutional activity, particularly with respect to the continued negotiations on the draft exploitation regulations, strengthening institutional partnerships, implementation of capacity-development initiatives, support for marine scientific research and efforts aimed at enhancing the Secretariat's operational capacity.

South Africa welcomes the progress achieved by the Council during the first part of the thirty-first session in advancing discussions on the outstanding issues relating to

the draft Exploitation Regulations. We note that the thematic approach adopted by the Council has assisted delegations in narrowing areas of divergence and identifying possible pathways towards consensus. South Africa remains committed to engaging constructively in these negotiations with a view to developing a comprehensive, balanced and legally sound Mining Code that faithfully implements Part XI of the Convention and the 1994 Agreement.

At the same time, South Africa reiterates that the development of the Mining Code must continue to be guided by the fundamental principles of the Convention, particularly the principle that the Area and its resources constitute the Common Heritage of Humankind. The Authority must therefore ensure that the regulatory framework promotes equitable benefit-sharing, effective protection of the marine environment, legal certainty, transparency and meaningful participation by all Member States, particularly developing States.

Mr. President,

South Africa welcomes the Secretariat's continued commitment to strengthening capacity development and marine scientific research. We commend the implementation of the Capacity Development Strategy through initiatives such as the Deep Dive Programme, the Capacity Development Alumni Network, the ISA Partnership Fund, the Women in Deep-Sea initiatives and, in particular, the African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy.

South Africa considers the African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy to be an important milestone in strengthening Africa's institutional and technical capacity to participate effectively in the governance of the Area. We encourage the Secretariat to ensure the sustainability of this initiative and to continue expanding opportunities that enable African experts, scientists, diplomats and policymakers to participate fully in the work of the Authority.

South Africa further welcomes the continued implementation of contractor training programmes and encourages the Secretariat to continue working towards ensuring that such opportunities are equitably distributed among developing States, including African States, in accordance with the Convention and the relevant exploration contracts.

While appreciating these initiatives, South Africa wishes to emphasize that capacity development should not be viewed merely as technical assistance. Rather, it constitutes one of the core obligations flowing from the Common Heritage of Humankind principle and should therefore contribute to reducing existing scientific, technological and institutional disparities between developed and developing States.

Mr. President,

In this regard, South Africa notes with concern the recently published judgments of the United Nations Appeals Tribunal concerning employment-related appeals against the Secretary-General. We note that the Tribunal found that the Authority's Joint Appeals Board had been improperly constituted in a manner inconsistent with the applicable Staff Rules, resulting in the matters being remanded for rehearing before properly constituted panels.

South Africa as a proponent of the rule of law and administrative justice, considers these judgments an important reminder of the need to maintain the highest standards of institutional governance, administrative accountability, procedural fairness and respect for the rule of law within the Authority. We therefore welcome the Secretariat's stated efforts to strengthen accountability mechanisms and encourage the continued implementation of appropriate measures to ensure full compliance with the applicable legal framework governing the administration of justice within the Authority.

Mr President,

South Africa welcomes the Authority's ongoing commitment to advancing the empowerment of women and promoting their leadership in non-traditional and emerging sectors, including deep-sea-related disciplines. We view such efforts as essential to fostering inclusive and sustainable development in the Area.

In this regard, we acknowledge with appreciation the progress made on the See Her Exceed Global Mentoring Programme implemented under the Women in Deep-Sea Research project. We are delighted to celebrate this milestone with you Madam SG as well as all the mentees including South Africa's own Ms Mpho Sehlano. South Africa is committed to supporting women in the maritime sector, and promote the recently launched SHE Gender Compact, as a global framework that sets out practical commitments to promote safe, inclusive and enabling environments for women participating in at-sea activities.

Mr. President,

South Africa wishes to underscore that the Authority remains an autonomous international organisation established under the Convention with a distinct legal mandate. Institutional cooperation should therefore continue to reinforce, rather than alter or expand, the Authority's mandate as determined by Member States under the Convention and the 1994 Agreement.

South Africa further notes the Secretariat's continued support for the operationalisation of the Economic Planning Commission and the Enterprise. These institutions constitute integral components of the Part XI regime, and their gradual development should continue in accordance with the Convention and the decisions of Member States.

Mr. President,

South Africa welcomes the continued efforts of the Authority and commends the dedication demonstrated by the Interim Director-General, Ambassador Eden Charles in advancing the operationalisation of the Enterprise. We regard this as a critical component of the Authority's mandate, as the Enterprise, once fully operational, will play a pivotal role in facilitating the effective participation of developing States in deep-seabed mining activities, particularly in respect of reserved areas.

My delegation further calls for the timely operationalisation of the Economic Planning Commission and urges the Council to expedite the necessary processes to ensure that this important organ becomes fully functional without further delay.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, South Africa remains committed to working constructively with all delegations to conclude a robust, balanced and universally acceptable regulatory framework that commands the confidence of all Member States and faithfully implements the Convention and the 1994 Agreement.

We assure the Secretary-General of our continued cooperation and support in advancing the work of the Authority in accordance with its mandate under the Convention.

I thank you.