



6 November 2025

New York, the UN Headquarters

ISA and Ocean of Opportunities for the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)

Speech by H. E. Ms. Leticia Reis de Carvalho,

Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

Welcome Excellencies, Colleagues, Friends,

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Chair of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries and the government of Zimbabwe for co-convening this important meeting.

I also extend my warm greetings to the distinguished Permanent Representatives of the LLDCs, to the President of the Council of the International Seabed Authority [if attending], to the Head of the Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and to our invited speakers and esteemed guests.

Let me acknowledge how delighted I am to welcome Kyrgyzstan as ISA's newest member, and 170th Member State.

Before I reflect on what stands before us as a pivotal moment in determining the health and prosperity of the world's oceans, please allow me to take the opportunity to acknowledge the catastrophic weather event, the category 5 Hurricane Melissa, that unleashed the strongest winds ever to hit the island nation of Jamaica on 28 October; home of the International Seabed Authority.

Experiencing the force of nature in the form of a hurricane is humbling. But it reminds us that the ocean is the beating heart of our planet's functioning and a key ally of human progress. In this moment, as proud and committed custodians of what the future will hold, we must take stock of the noble mission that we have the privilege to guide. We hold in our hands nothing less than the future of effective and inclusive ocean governance.

It is particularly meaningful that our discussions take place during the very week in which we commemorate, for the first time, the International Day of the Deep Seabed-- a landmark observance proclaimed by the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority this last July, mandating ISA to bring the world's attention to the importance of the deep seabed with a day of reflection, commitment and action. This day celebrates 1 November 1967, when Maltese diplomat Arvid Pardo stood before the UN and called on humanity to treat the seabed beyond national jurisdiction as the *common heritage of humankind*. His words were visionary.

He urged us to prevent conflict, to protect the oceans for peaceful purposes and to ensure that the wealth of the seabed would serve not just the powerful, but all states, especially the developing ones. That vision gave birth to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea – the Constitution for our Ocean - and to the International Seabed Authority.

In this spirit, it is both a privilege and a profound honour to welcome you to this workshop dedicated to enhancing the engagement of landlocked developing countries in the governance and stewardship of the deep seabed in international waters.

Your presence here today is not only appreciated, it is essential. It underscores a fundamental truth: that the sustainable management of ocean resources is a shared global responsibility, and opportunity, one that transcends borders, coastlines, and geographies.

For more than thirty years, UNCLOS has provided the foundation for the peaceful use, management, and protection of the ocean and its resources.

ISA is tasked with organizing, regulating, and controlling all mineral-related activities in the Area, representing 54% of the world's oceans. This is about 260 million square kilometres, making its jurisdiction larger than the entire surface area of all continents combined. This includes overseeing exploration and future exploitation, promoting marine scientific research, facilitating technology transfer and capacity-building, and ensuring rigorous environmental protection. To date, almost 2 million square kilometers of the Clarion Clipperton Zone between Hawaii and Mexico have been protected from all future mining activities.

The Authority, headquartered in beautiful Jamaica, stands as a symbol of multilateralism anchored in the Global South. From its base in Kingston, the Authority brings together nations from all regions of the world to ensure that the deep seabed is managed responsibly, sustainably, and for the benefit of all humankind.

The principle of common heritage of humankind is not merely aspirational or symbolic; it is a binding legal and moral obligation. It calls upon all nations, regardless of their proximity to the ocean, to participate in and benefit from the governance of these resources in a manner that is equitable, inclusive, and sustainable.

Common heritage of humankind means that no single nation, no single corporation, and no single interest group can claim sovereign rights to the Area or its resources. It belongs to all of us.

Therefore, all of us must have a voice in how it is governed and a duty to defend it. This includes LLDCs, whose lack of direct access to the sea must never be a barrier to participation.

The increased demand for key strategic minerals, combined with the tightening of land-based supplies, and advances in technology that will enable much more selective extraction, mean that deep seabed mining is an increasingly attractive option for investment in mineral development.

Against this backdrop, I highlight that ISA's entire system of regulation is based on consensus, best available scientific evidence and transparency. It is a unique case, since there has been no other industrial undertaking where the international community has had the chance to develop regulations before activities commence.

ISA's mandate is comprehensive and ambitious. Beyond its regulatory responsibilities, ISA makes a substantive contribution to marine scientific research, deep sea literacy and capacity development. The most promising avenues for LLDC engagement is through these pursuits. The ISA Action Plan for Marine Scientific Research and its flagship initiatives offer direct opportunities for LLDCs to access data and research activities on deep-sea environments. These facilitate participation in the science-policy interface of ISA and contributions to advancing global deep-sea science.

ISA capacity-building programmes have been implemented with a special focus on underrepresented communities in ocean science and governance. More than 1,000 individuals from developing States have already received expert deep-sea training.

Let me share a few inspiring examples.

- Zambia's Ms. Charity Chanda participated in ISA's Contractors' Training Programme and contributed to the Africa Deep Seabed Resources initiative, bridging land-based mining expertise with ocean governance.
- Mongolia's Mr. Bat-Erdene Tuvshin gained valuable skills in seabed mapping and mineral resource assessment through the ISA-China Joint Training and Research Centre.

- Burkina Faso’s Ms. Awa Ouédraogo, a participant in the “See Her Exceed” mentoring program, now leads national outreach on ocean science and LLDC rights under UNCLOS.

ISA also works with strategic partners to power the success of LLDCs. For instance, in collaboration with the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, ISA supported two national deployments of experts to the Secretariat through a joint project framework with the UN Technology Bank for LDCs; this initiative was established in 2022 to strengthen capacities for the sustainable development of emerging blue economic sectors. A geologist from Nepal assessed sediment characteristics within the Clarion–Clipperton Zone, while a marine scientist from Tanzania advanced sediment plume modelling.

ISA’s DeepData platform provides open access to a growing repository of environmental data collected by ISA contractors. This enables LLDC researchers and institutions to contribute meaningfully to global scientific efforts, while equipping LLDCs with knowledge and information to effectively take part in ISA decision-making.

LLDCs with strong land-based mining sectors possess unique strengths that can be leveraged in deep-sea governance across technical expertise in mineral processing, environmental monitoring, and resource management. ISA can facilitate partnerships between LLDC mining institutions and ISA contractors to share best practices and foster innovation. LLDCs can host regional research activities focused on seabed mineral analysis, utilizing existing mining labs and universities. They can also develop accredited training programs in collaboration with ISA, preparing professionals for roles in seabed exploration and environmental assessments.

Excellencies,

UNCLOS explicitly recognizes the unique circumstances of LLDCs and provides for preferential treatment to ensure meaningful participation. This is not a token gesture, it is a legal commitment that affirms LLDCs must be granted equitable access to both monetary and non-monetary benefits derived from activities in the Area, including training opportunities, knowledge, and technology. The collective governance of the Area under ISA, including equitable sharing of benefits from its resources, is a right, and a responsibility.

LLDCs have been key actors in ISA, and I want to thank you for your support and active engagement. In fact, the current Ugandan President of the ISA Council comes from a LLDC. I believe that there is even more possibility for strengthening this contribution to multilateralism, for tapping into the opportunities provided by a sustainable blue economy, and for implementing the Awaza Programme of Action for LLDCs for the Decade 2024–2034.

To date, ISA has entered 31 exploration contracts with entities from around the world. These contracts are governed by a robust legal framework known as the Mining Code, which is currently being further developed to include exploitation regulations. This Code is designed to ensure that all activities in the Area are conducted responsibly, transparently, and with full regard for environmental protection.

We recently received a new application for an exploration contract sponsored by the Kingdom of Bahrain, which reaffirms the trust of member States in ISA and its regime. I invite more LLDC countries to consider becoming ISA sponsoring states.

The so-called “reserved areas” mechanism is a key component of the system of access to the Area and its mineral resources under UNCLOS. It is one of the means by which UNCLOS ensures that developing countries can access deep-sea mineral resources. Reserved areas are contributed by developed States when they apply to ISA for exploration rights. They are then held in a site bank,

reserved for access by developing countries or the Enterprise. Several developing countries have taken advantage of the provisions in UNCLOS to sponsor exploration activities in the reserved areas.

Further, UNCLOS established The Enterprise, which is an organ of the Authority aimed at guaranteeing that all States, including those that are developing and land-locked, can participate in deep-sea activities even if they lack the capital or technology to do so alone. It acts as a public partner that can form joint ventures with developing States or their national companies, allowing them to share in the returns and build capacity.

Dear Friends,

I believe that LLDCs can and should continue taking leadership roles in ISA discussions, particularly on equitable benefit-sharing and the finalisation of the regulations for exploitation activities in the Area.

ISA's strategic vision is rooted in the belief that the deep seabed must be governed not only with scientific rigor and environmental responsibility but also with fairness, transparency, and inclusivity. Over the next decade, ISA aims to become a global center of excellence for deep-sea governance where developing countries, including LLDCs, are active architects of policy, science, and innovation.

In 2025, a key element in the 30th Session of the Council of the ISA were deliberations over the design of the benefit-sharing mechanism that will govern financial and economic benefits from activities in the Area beyond national jurisdiction. This will also be an important topic for the 31st session.

Article 82 of UNCLOS provides for a system of revenue sharing between coastal States and the international community related to the exploitation of the non-living resources in extended continental shelves. ISA is tasked with administering these funds and has been working on defining options for a mechanism for its distribution. The first payment to be shared is foreseen in the near future. In both cases, active participation of LLDCs is required to ensure their interests and needs are effectively reflected in the relevant decisions.

ISA's work also aligns with broader global ocean governance efforts, including the BBNJ Agreement, the UN Decade of Ocean Science, and the Sustainable Development Goals. These synergies ensure that our work contributes to a holistic vision of ocean governance.

Many of the objectives of the BBNJ Agreement mirror the core mandate that UNCLOS entrusts to the ISA. Over the past 30 years, the ISA has gained unique experience in the common threads running through both regimes: capacity-building, transfer of marine technology, environmental protection, and benefit-sharing.

ISA stands ready to share our expertise and to align and support the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement. We envisage a complementary relationship where the ISA continues to manage seabed mineral activities, while the BBNJ COP manages marine biodiversity, each within our respective mandates in a mutually reinforcing way and ensuring the principle of non-undermining is effectively implemented.

In closing, we recognize that LLDCs face unique challenges in engaging with ocean-related activities. These challenges—geographic, infrastructural, and institutional—are real. But they also present opportunities for innovation, partnership, and leadership. Your countries bring valuable perspectives, expertise, and potential to global conversation on deep-sea governance.

Let us remember: the ocean may not touch your borders, but its future is shaped by your voice. The deep sea belongs to no one, but is the responsibility of us all. Your participation in the governance of the deep sea enriches all efforts.

Let us move forward to ensure that no country is left behind in the journey toward sustainable development. The Authority stands ready to walk that journey with you to build a legacy of cooperation, knowledge, and shared prosperity that future generations will be proud to inherit.

Thank you.