



**Keynote remarks**  
**at the Workshop on Interactions between the International Seabed Authority**  
**and BBNJ Agreement bodies and processes**  
**New York**  
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**By**  
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Excellencies, colleagues, friends,

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 this force of nature is humbling. From a storm's fury, to the seasons we count on, the food we eat, the resources we need to innovate, and the medicines we have yet to discover, 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 complementary ocean governance.

This year, we commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations. This milestone reminds us of the principles that brought nations together eight decades ago and the enduring power of cooperation and consensus. Peace, dialogue, and shared responsibility for the common good. These principles are being tested, which makes the need for us to activate and demonstrate success more crucial than ever. Failure is not an option, lest we prove what the naysayers are claiming: that the UN is no longer fit for purpose.

Just weeks ago, the General Assembly concluded its annual session. Vivid commentary of the current challenges facing humanity, and the hopes that still abound for sustainable development, were punctuated by very divergent views. Across every discussion, from peace and climate, to technology and equity, multilateralism was being both questioned and reinforced. The majority of countries doubled down on the fact that while we may have weaknesses, the UN is our best option to avoid another global conflict and to maintain the

principles of human rights. It was apparent at this crossroads that we must work to strengthen multilateralism, not abandon it.

This conviction brings us together today. As much as we are drawn to the simple soundbyte, the road ahead can't be oversimplified. We are dealing with complex matters that must be navigated, together; all voices heard, all voices counted, paving the way for a roadmap that *is* fit for purpose, equitable, and draws on all the complementary strengths at our disposal. A roadmap that can show that the UN at 80 can deliver on our dreams and ambitions, while negotiating our challenges.

Four days ago, the first International Day of Deep Seabed, sponsored by the governments of Fiji, Jamaica, Malta and Singapore, was observed. On this day in 1967, one November, 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 and to the International Seabed Authority. It still guides us today, as we serve the recent mandate from our 170 Member States to bring the world's attention to the importance of the deep seabed with a day of reflection, commitment and action. Showing, *and growing*, the ways in which the ISA's work is:

- advancing deep-sea research, technology and innovation
- enabling capacity building and knowledge exchange
- turning the aspiration of equitable benefit sharing into a realistic business model
- and emphasizing the importance of upholding multilateralism, the rule of law and regulatory development to safeguard the exclusive mandate anchored by the common heritage of humankind.

Colleagues, as you are aware, the deep seabed is one of Earth's last great frontiers. It is home to geological formations and ecosystems millions of years in the making; ecosystems that advances in technology and innovation are now helping us to better understand. ISA has been exploring the depths for over 30 years. Though less than 1% of the Area has been approved for exploration, 31 contracts across the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans, are informing both the science and the steps we need to protect the deep seabed. Across ISA's exploration areas, around 170,000 species observations have been recorded. The ISA DeepData database holds approximately 175,000 unique taxonomic records, supporting an adaptive, science-based approach to managing activities in the Area. The ISA Deep-Sea Biobank will enhance global access to these resources. Capacity-development and technology transfer have been integral to the ISA. More than 1,000 individuals from developing States have received expert deep-sea training.

The ISA has taken effective measures to protect the deep-sea marine environment through Regional Environment Management Plans (REMPs). These plans set overarching environmental goals and objectives and establish environmental management measures, with cumulative effects taken into account. To date, almost 2 million square kilometers of the Clarion Clipperton Zone between Hawaii and Mexico have been protected from all future mining activities. ISA is expanding efforts to protect more sensitive areas, through partnerships that map the seabed at high resolution, and by collecting millions of data points on ocean currents, salinity, temperature and biodiversity, to enrich our understanding of deep-sea environments and to better inform global decision making.

Consequently, ISA holds a unique position that combines practical experience in exploring, managing and governing this complex environment. For over three decades, the ISA has remained steadfast in carrying out its mandate for the benefit of all, standing as a demonstrated pillar of multilateralism and an enduring platform where States are working together to uphold the rule of law and to build roadmaps to ensure that opportunities are considered thoughtfully, balancing economic, environmental and social considerations. 30 years of management experience has outlined the contours for the conservation and sustainable development of the deep sea beyond national jurisdiction, which can become assets and parameters for the BBNJ Agreement.

Today's workshop is testament to this shared commitment towards meaningful engagement, coherence and complementarity with the bodies and processes established under the BBNJ Agreement to contribute to its success. The BBNJ Agreement constitutes a new building block of UNCLOS, representing a milestone in multilateral efforts toward global ocean governance. The International Seabed Authority warmly welcomes this significant progress and looks forward to building on our decades of experience, to work hand in hand with BBNJ to promote a rules-based ocean order in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

In closing, I want to pay respect to our auspicious location. This Permanent Mission of the Republic of Singapore to the United Nations reminds us of two distinguished Singaporean diplomats: Ambassador Tommy T. B. Koh, President of the third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea and Ambassador Rena Lee, President of the Intergovernmental Conference on an international legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. The historic leadership of these two Presidents from Singapore vividly illustrate the profound relevance and power of determination, negotiation and consensus building. The same enduring qualities that must anchor our actions and collaboration to ensure that the whole is greater than the sum of our parts.

Excellencies, I shall end with a reminder. The interest in deep sea mining preceded the Law of the Sea, which was put in place to establish order and safeguards in such endeavors. Whether by social or economic phenomenon, markets surge—fueled by perceived opportunity, investment interest, technological advancement or geopolitics. For the Area to continue to be the common heritage of humankind, including its biodiversity, a fully-

fledged international framework is our best chance to secure the sustainable use and conservation of deep-sea marine biodiversity.

I trust that the discussions during this Workshop will provide valuable insights to inform policy deliberations within the ISA, as well as within the BBNJ Preparatory Commission and the Conference of the Parties.

The world is watching. Now is the time to rise to the challenge.