



Deputy Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet of the International Seabed Authority delivers opening remarks for “Race to the Bottom? Fostering Evidence-Based Dialogue and Action on Deep-Sea Minerals and Metals” UNEA side event.

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Excellencies, colleagues, friends,

Is there a race to the bottom?

Or is there a risk that without a strong, regulated, environmentally sound multilateral framework we witness, powerless, a race to the bottom?

Like with everything we do, conservation, protection and sustainable use are in danger when governance frameworks fail or are not supported.

When it comes to the deep seabed, such failure to adopt a strong, regulated and environmentally sound multilateral framework would without doubt lead to a race to the bottom, in which the principles of equity and sustainable use that guided humanity when it declared the deep sea bed a common heritage of humankind, would be torn apart.

We cannot accept that and we must stick to the vision developed that led to the creation of the International seabed authority, a vision of foresight and communal responsibility.

Because before the technology to reach the seabed even existed, the international community made this collective choice to recognize the mineral resources of the Area as the

common heritage of humankind. This is rare in human history, and it is history worth protecting.

This principle remains the cornerstone of our mandate.

It means that no nation, no corporation, and no single interest group can claim rights over the Area.

It means that benefits and responsibilities must be shared equitably.

And it affirms that environmental protection is inseparable from justice, inter generational equity, peace, and the stability that only multilateralism can provide.

For 30 years, the International Seabed Authority has carried out this dual mandate, to regulate and to protect, with consistency and foresight. We have overseen exploration under a strict legal framework for 30 years; advanced scientific understanding through millions of openly shared environmental data points; built capacity and enabled technology transfer for developing States; and secured nearly two million square kilometres of Areas of Particular Environmental Interest where mineral extraction is prohibited.

These actions reflect a fundamental truth drawn directly from our global-commons experience: governance must guide activity, not follow it.

This brings me to the point I want to raise today with our colleagues in the environmental community, a community that both SG Carvalho and myself cherish and feel part of.

Your concerns about the deep seabed are valid and they are guiding our actions and thinking at every moment. These ecosystems are ancient, fragile, and still being discovered and understood. But the strongest environmental safeguards to ensure that they are conserved and protected adequately are built through the regulatory framework itself, not outside it. A moratorium would not guarantee this, and any unilateral action outside of the multilateral arena would also obviously destroy the hopes of the common heritage that visionary ocean leaders projected more than 60 years ago.

The Mining Code is the instrument through which the precautionary principles, scientific thresholds, monitoring systems, regional environmental management plans, benefit-

sharing and strict compliance obligations will come together. And it is through this process that we will avoid the lowest common denominator and safeguard these unique ecosystems while delivering the promise of a common good and benefit sharing.

Finalizing this legal framework is essential and it is also crucial to underscore that getting the rules, regulations and procedures in place does not mean the commencement of mining; it means that *if* any future activity is ever considered, it must take place within the rules based system— because without rules, there are no meaningful safeguards.

If you want the highest level of protection, your influence is greatest now, while these foundations are being finalized. Supporting the Authority's leadership at this moment strengthens environmental safeguards, not industry interests.

We cannot fail now.

Because when multilateralism retreats, the vacuum does not remain empty; it is filled by unilateral action, and by the erosion of equity. That is the true race to the bottom.

This is why the United Nations Secretary-General's warning at the UN Ocean Conference in Nice is so important: "the deep sea cannot become the Wild West."

Colleagues, the world is watching how we govern this global common.

We have a clear mandate supported by increasing political will to deliver it.

We have the legal framework at hand.

We have rapidly growing science and fast evolving technology to help avoid the mistakes of the past.

What we need now is cohesion and constructive engagement, not division and fear. So, let me close with a message that is urgent, but grounded in cooperation and shared purpose:

Work with us. Strengthen the multilateral regime now, while it can still guarantee transparency, environmental integrity, and equity. Help ensure that if humanity ever

considers activities in the deep seabed, they occur only under rules crafted collectively, for the benefit of all, and with the highest environmental safeguards ever designed.

This is how we avoid a race to the bottom.

This is how we uphold the common heritage of humankind.

This is how we prove multilateralism is still fit for purpose.

Thank you.