



Opening Remarks for the Legal and Technical Commission 31st Session Pt I

by H.E. Madam Secretary-General Leticia Carvalho

23 February 2026

ISA Headquarters, Kingston

Distinguished Members of the Legal and Technical Commission,
Colleagues and Friends,

It is a privilege to welcome you to Kingston for the thirty-first Session of the Legal and Technical Commission.

Allow me first to express my sincere appreciation to the Government and people of Jamaica for the continued support as host country of the International Seabed Authority.

February is Reggae Month here in Jamaica, a reminder that culture carries messages of unity and resilience across the world. And as we gather here to commence the work of the 31st Session, let us remember that coming together for a shared, and complex, mission isn't always easy. But together, with determination and sense of purpose, we can find our commonalities and chart a path to deliver the promise of the common heritage of humankind.

As I look around, I am pleased to see a room full of colleagues who I know take this mission seriously. I thank each of you for your dedication, your expertise, and commitment, and for travelling to Jamaica for what will be an intensive and demanding session; but one that I am sure will continue to deliver the necessary building blocks.

Allow me to extend a special welcome to Mr. Rodrigo Urquiza Caroca of Chile, who rejoins the Commission after previously serving from 2002 to 2006.

I also wish to acknowledge the service of Mr. Paulus Kainge of Namibia and Mr. Gamal Metwally of Egypt. I thank them for their contributions and wish them every future success.

You, the LTC, are the technical backbone of this Authority. The credibility of our decisions rests on the rigor, independence, and quality of your assessments. I believe that in complex governance, confidence is built through consistent and objective judgment. Your work provides this foundation.

We meet at an important moment. The consolidation of global ocean governance under UNCLOS – from deep seabed to the shallows – is advancing, following the entry into force of the BBNJ Agreement.

Within this evolving framework, the ISA has a clear and distinct mandate with respect to activities in the Area. As this mandate is exercised, it must be anchored in sound science, legal clarity, and technical integrity.

It is through your independent work that this standard is upheld.

Governance must guide activity, not follow it. I again point out that this is unique in human history and a point that must not be taken lightly. This principle is operationalized through your careful, objective, and evidence-based deliberations. In doing so, you help safeguard our global commons; a last remaining frontier of human activity.

The workload before you is considerable as you are on the front line of determining the way in which the multilateral system will advance intergenerational progress.

The agenda for the coming weeks will call for focus, efficiency, and collaboration –and *a roll up our sleeves* team spirit.

ISA's institutional maturity will be measured by consistency, by independence, and by the soundness of technical judgment. *I have full confidence in your ability to uphold these standards.*

A key priority will be the consideration of an application for a plan of work for exploration submitted by Impossible Metals Bahrain W.L.L, sponsored by the Government of the Kingdom of

Bahrain. You are entrusted to conduct this review with objectivity and thoroughness, in full accordance with the Convention.

You also have before you eight applications for extensions of exploration contracts that are due to expire in 2026. Each requires careful and detailed consideration, consistent with the legal framework and established procedures.

I expect that as the Commission considers the application for a new contract, and contract extensions, the outcome will reflect a continued strengthening of the Contractors Training Programme, which is a vital part of the Authority's efforts on capacity-building in line with the recommendations of the Commission; this Programme has brought substantive benefits to developing States, and must continue to help bridge knowledge gaps on the diverse topics related to deep-sea mineral exploration.

I'm delighted to highlight that in 2024–25, contractors provided more than eighty training opportunities for nationals of developing States — nearly half for women. Over one thousand individuals have been trained since 1994. And through our specialized capacity building centers of excellence with ISA- China and Egypt Joint Training and Research Centres, and the newly inaugurated African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy, we are advancing knowledge on law and science in the Global South in truly meaningful ways.

I take this opportunity to thank the members of the training sub-group for their hard intersessional work in selecting candidates for the Programme. During this session, I understand that the sub-group will continue selecting candidates for several other Programmes, with full support from the Secretariat.

The work we are undertaking in this session on Regional Environmental Management Plans and environmental thresholds is a critical step in enabling ISA to translate science into concrete policy measures. It will help us move from principle to practice in operationalizing the precautionary approach and will strengthen how ISA gives concrete effect to Article 145 of UNCLOS, and its mandate to ensure the effective protection of the deep-sea environment and its unique habitats.

I applaud your efforts as I understand that the Draft Report on environmental thresholds has been well advanced by LTC co-chairs and is expected to be released for public consultation during the intersessional period of the 31st Session. The LTC co-chairs will also introduce the key outcomes and next steps to the LTC plenary. This includes recommending a process standard (zone-of-influence

approach) ,and methodology guidelines, to determine precautionary reference points of high, moderate, and negligible impacts. These Standards and Guidelines will evolve with increasing baseline studies and testing of mining equipment. *This is excellent progress.*

I would also like to sincerely acknowledge your continued support and commitment to the activities carried out by the Secretariat under the MSR action plan.

Together, we are pushing the boundaries of what we know about deep-sea ecosystems through initiatives like the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative. We are improving equitable access to deep-sea samples through the Biobank; and we are strengthening and expanding the value of DeepData, while advancing the work needed to better understand and manage cumulative impacts.

Your vision and expertise is what enables these efforts to move forward. The Secretariat stands ready to support you in every way possible.

In this regard, I would also like to introduce two colleagues who will be working closely with you during this session and beyond. Ms. Ruth Njeri Gichuhi serves as Chief of the Office of Administrative Services, and Mr. Aleksei Shapoval, Senior Policy Officer in the Office of Stewardship, Environment and Resources. They, together with the broader Secretariat team, remain fully committed to providing you with the technical, policy, administrative and communications support required to facilitate your work.

I look forward to engaging with you, both in the formal proceedings and in informal exchanges, throughout the next two weeks.

Institutions endure when expertise, productivity and integrity prevail. I am confident that this Commission will continue to embody these noble traits.

Thank you.