



**Governing the Common Heritage of Humankind, Protecting the Marine
Environment, and Regulating Deep-Sea Mining
Geneva Dialogues on Minerals and Metals**

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STATEMENT

by

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Excellencies,

Distinguished colleagues,

Friends,

It is a pleasure to join you here in Geneva, a city that has long served as an epicenter of multilateralism, where complex global questions are not avoided, but faced, negotiated, and shaped into institutions that endure.

We meet at a moment of profound consequence for the future of the ocean, and for humanity's ability to govern what it shares.

Because 2026 is not simply another year in ocean diplomacy.

It is the year in which the global ocean governance architecture under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea finally becomes whole.

As you all know, in 1994, a historic step was taken by the international community, and the International Seabed Authority was created, with a mission to regulate the sustainable use of the Area and equally protect the unique ecosystems of the deep seabed.

With the entry into force of the BBNJ Agreement, the international community is now taking a bold step toward towards a consolidated ocean governance.

For the first time, we now have a comprehensive legal framework that spans areas beyond national jurisdiction, from the deep seabed to the surface, to help ensure the sustainable use of all ocean resources, be they mineral or biodiversity related.

It is the moment when the UNCLOS system, carefully constructed over decades, moves from design to maturity.

And with maturity comes responsibility.

The ocean covers more than 70 per cent of the Earth's surface.

It regulates our climate and seasons, sustains biodiversity, provides food, and supports the livelihoods of billions of people. It also contains untapped critical mineral resource reserves that belong to us all.

In 1967, Maltese diplomat Arvid Pardo stood before the United Nations 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 ocean for peaceful purposes, and to ensure that the wealth of the seabed would serve not the powerful, but all States, especially developing ones.

That vision gave birth to UNCLOS.

And it gave birth to the International Seabed Authority.

This principle remains the cornerstone of our mandate and is central to consolidated global ocean governance.

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 intergenerationally.

And it affirms that the sustainable use of ocean resources is inseparable from justice, equity, peace, and the stability, that only multilateralism can deliver.

Before the technology to reach the seabed even existed, the international community made a collective choice: to ensure that governance would guide activity, not follow it.

This is rare in human history.

And it is history worth protecting.

For more than 30 years, the International Seabed Authority has carried out this mandate, to regulate and to protect, and to design a pathway by which to share benefits with foresight and consistency.

During this time, the Authority has:

- overseen exploration under a strict legal framework
- generated millions of environmental data points, openly shared through DeepData
- designated nearly two million square kilometres of Areas of Particular Environmental Interest where mining will be prohibited
- built capacity and enabled technology transfer for developing States
- and advanced deep-sea science in one of Earth's least understood environments

Building and transferring knowledge, no less than minerals, is part of the common heritage of humankind.

This operational experience matters, because governance of the global commons is not theoretical.

It is built through practice, institutions, and trust.

The BBNJ Agreement constitutes a new building block of UNCLOS and represents a milestone in multilateral efforts toward global ocean governance.

Its success will depend on coherence, coordination, and complementarity.

This is why the of the International Seabed Authority is so relevant.

With more than three decades of operational experience and the world's most extensive deep-sea environmental database, ISA provides a strong scientific and institutional foundation to our understanding of the deep sea. This can enhance effective BBNJ implementation, while respecting distinct mandates and avoiding duplication.

Together, these regimes allow us to finally govern the ocean as what it is: one interconnected system; and through a more comprehensive and holistic approach.

Excellencies,

If 2026 is the year of consolidation of global ocean governance, then we must also be honest about what consolidation requires.

It requires that the governance architecture under UNCLOS is not only legally complete, but operationally complete.

For the deep seabed, this means that 2026 must be the year when we complete our rules and regulations, finalizing the mining code and the protection of this unique environment.

This is a critical milestone to work towards because the deep seabed is **not** a peripheral space in the ocean system, it covers 54 per cent of the total area of the world's ocean -- an area larger than the land mass of all continents combined.

Until the rules, regulations, and procedures are in place, the architecture of global ocean governance cannot yet be considered complete.

And incompleteness creates risk:

- risk of fragmentation,
- risk of unilateral action
- risk of uneven standards,
- and risk to the very principle of equity that the common heritage of humankind was meant to protect.

If the deep seabed becomes the wild west, so too will the depths to reach it...

Therefore, completing this framework is how we close the gaps; securing protection, sustainable use and benefit sharing.

Let me speak directly to the environmental community, a community that I deeply respect and am deeply a part of.

Your concerns about the seabed are valid.

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 of it.

A moratorium would not align with the principle of the rule of law as defined by UNCLOS. Beyond this, it would not guarantee protection as it has no teeth against unilateral actors.

And any unilateral action outside the multilateral arena would destroy the hopes of the common heritage that visionary ocean leaders projected more than 60 years ago.

If we fail to adopt a strong, regulated, environmentally sound multilateral framework, we risk witnessing - powerless - a true race to the bottom.

Because when multilateralism retreats, the vacuum does not remain empty.

It is filled by opportunists and by the erosion of equity.

That is the real race to the bottom.

This is why the Mining Code matters now.

Not because of mining itself.

But because without rules, there are no safeguards.

The Mining Code is the instrument through which precautionary principles, scientific thresholds, monitoring systems, regional environmental management plans, benefit-sharing, and strict compliance obligations will come together.

Getting the rules in place means that when humanity considers exploitation activities in the deep seabed, they must occur only under collectively agreed rules, for the benefit of all, and with the highest environmental safeguards.

If you want the highest level of protection, your support is greatest now, as these foundations are being finalized.

In a year of consolidation, our task is not to deepen divisions, but to find common ground.

The completion of the regulatory framework will require consensus.

As Secretary-General, I see my role as a convener: to safeguard the common heritage of humankind and the mandate entrusted to the International Seabed Authority, while bringing together 170 Member States and the European Union, the scientific community, the environmental community, industry, and civil society.

Each has a legitimate stake. Each brings essential perspectives. And each must have confidence that their concerns are part of the whole.

My commitment is to help bridge these perspectives, so that we can finalize a framework that is precautionary, science-based, equitable, and worthy of the trust placed in this institution.

Excellencies,

We have the tools:

- a comprehensive legal framework,
- robust institutions,
- growing science,
- rapid technological advancement,
- and decades of experience.

What we need now is cohesion and responsibility.

The responsibility to finish what is asked of us.

The responsibility to complete the governance architecture we designed together.

The responsibility to protect what belongs to everyone, before it is lost.

If we succeed, 2026 will be remembered as a year of consolidation and decision, the year when global ocean governance became whole.

And that is a legacy worthy of our collective stewardship.

Thank you.