



Madam Secretary-General Leticia Carvalho's Opening Remarks of the inaugural in-person phase of the African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy at the International Relations Institute of Cameroon

9 February 2026

Yaoundé, Cameroon

Distinguished guests,
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues and participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to join you today in Yaoundé for the opening of the African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy.

I wish to once again thank the Government of the Republic of Cameroon for its hospitality, and to commend the International Relations Institute of Cameroon for hosting this inaugural in-person phase of the Academy. Yaoundé has long been a centre of diplomatic excellence, and it is both fitting and meaningful that we gather here to strengthen Africa's collective capacity in ocean governance.

I warmly welcome all participants: African diplomats, government officials and policy makers, representing all five African sub-regions, and reflecting the continent's rich diversity of coastal States, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing States.

The African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy matters because it responds directly to priorities expressed by African Member States.

Over recent years, African members of the International Seabed Authority have consistently underscored the need for tailored, practical and high-quality training on the legal and institutional regime governing the seabed beyond national jurisdiction, referred as the "Area".

ADSEA is a concrete response to that call.

It is a platform designed not only to inform, but to equip and empower. A space where knowledge translates into confidence, and confidence into effective participation.

Established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1994 Agreement relating to its implementation, the International Seabed Authority is entrusted with the responsibility to organize and control activities in the Area on behalf of humankind as a whole.

Central to this responsibility is ensuring effective participation by all States, including through training, knowledge-sharing and the development of national expertise.

This is not an abstract responsibility. It is one that I hold deeply, because participation is how the principles of the Convention are given practical meaning.

At the heart of this regime lies a fundamental principle, that the resources of the Area are the common heritage of humankind.

This principle represents one of the most significant innovations not only in the law of the sea, but in international law more broadly.

It gives life to a shared vision of responsibility and benefit, ensuring that the development of deep seabed resources serves all States, including landlocked and geographically disadvantaged countries. It also ensures that the law *comes before activity* versus responding to it; **a unique design in our human history.**

The African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy is one way in which the Authority delivers on that responsibility.

By strengthening legal, technical and diplomatic understanding, it supports informed and effective participation in the processes through which decisions on the common heritage of humankind are taken.

For that principle to be meaningful, participation must be informed.

This is particularly important at a time when the Authority is advancing work on the Mining Code, including the development of a legal framework of rules, regulations and procedures that would govern exploitation should it occur; to be accompanied by standards and guidelines that will operationalize the Code. These institutional measures will also ensure environmental protection, transparency and accountability.

These processes will shape benefit-sharing and the distribution of both monetary and non-monetary benefits. They will also influence how scientific knowledge, technology and capacity are developed and transferred over time. Capacity-development and technology transfer have

been integral to the Authority. Since 1994, more than 1,000 individuals from developing States have received expert deep-sea training.

The more legally, technically and diplomatically prepared delegations are, the stronger their ability to engage meaningfully, to negotiate effectively, and to safeguard national and regional interests within the collective framework of the Convention.

In this context, Africa's place within the International Seabed Authority is central.

African States play a significant role in the Assembly and the Council, and African experts contribute actively to the work of subsidiary bodies, including the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee. Across discussions on environmental management, benefit-sharing, institutional arrangements and the rights and responsibilities of sponsoring States, African perspectives have been instrumental. Most recently Uganda has held the role of Council Presidency.

Africa's stake in these discussions is multidimensional.

Coastal States have direct interests in marine environmental protection and sustainable ocean economies. Landlocked States, whose special circumstances are explicitly recognized under the Convention, have the right to participate in activities in the Area and to share in the benefits derived therefrom. States with established mining sectors bring valuable experience to discussions on coherent and equitable benefit-sharing frameworks.

In short, Africa is a co-shaper of the rules, and a co-steward of the common heritage.

This Academy has been designed to support precisely that role.

Over the course of this week, you will examine legal concepts and institutional structures, and work through practical scenarios that reflect how decisions are made within the Authority.

You will engage in negotiation simulations that mirror real processes in the Council and the Assembly. You will undertake drafting exercises that strengthen your ability to engage in text-based negotiations, where every word matters and outcomes are often determined.

You will also deepen your understanding of how the organs of the Authority interact: the Assembly, the Council, the Secretariat and the advisory bodies that support implementation.

I encourage you to make full use of this space: to learn, to exchange perspectives, to challenge assumptions, and to build professional networks that extend beyond this week.

Diplomatic effectiveness is strengthened when positions are grounded in knowledge, when dialogue is guided by preparation rather than reaction, and when cooperation is informed by mutual understanding.

Excellencies and colleagues,

The African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy forms part of the Authority's broader commitment to capacity development as a strategic investment.

It aligns with the ISA Capacity Development Strategy and complements initiatives such as the Deep-Dive e-learning platform, Joint Training and Research Centres, national expert deployments and activities supported through the ISA Partnership Fund.

It also contributes to the objectives of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development by strengthening the human and institutional capacity required to translate science into policy, and policy into responsible governance.

In advancing capacity development, the Authority is also firmly committed to gender equality and the empowerment of women in ocean affairs. I therefore welcome the strong participation of women in this cohort.

Just last week, on the occasion of my joining the UN International Gender Champion network, I had the honour of meeting its distinguished chair, honourable Martin Chungong, who is also the Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Geneva. Hailing from Cameroon, Mr Chungong is the first non-European and first African to be elected to this distinguished role; his alma mater is in fact the University of Yaoundé. I very much look forward to working with the Union to raise awareness for our work amongst African Parliamentarians.

A deep-seabed regime that reflects the common heritage of humankind must also reflect inclusiveness in its expertise and decision-making.

As you look ahead, I encourage you to view this training not as a single event, but as the beginning of a longer journey.

The value of this Academy will be realized when you return to your institutions and apply this knowledge, by strengthening national coordination, advising on policy positions, contributing to multilateral negotiations and supporting the development of national expertise.

I also encourage you to remain engaged with the Authority beyond this week, through continued training opportunities, applications for positions in the Secretariat and active participation in ISA processes.

Let me conclude by once again thanking the Government of Cameroon and International Relations Institute of Cameroon for their partnership and hospitality, and by congratulating all participants on your commitment to public service and diplomacy.

The work of ocean governance is demanding and complex, but it is also essential to the shared future we are building.

It is therefore with great pleasure that I declare the African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy officially open. I wish you a productive and inspiring week of learning, exchange and collaboration.

Je vous remercie de votre attention et vous souhaite une excellente semaine de travail, d'échanges et de collaboration au sein de l'Académie africaine de diplomatie des fonds marins.

Merci. Thank you.