



Opening remarks for Part I of the 31st Council Session

by H.E. Madam Secretary-General, Leticia Carvalho

9 March 2026

Plenary

Jamaica Conference Centre, Kingston, Jamaica

Mr. President,

Distinguished members of the Council,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege to extend a warm welcome to all delegations to our host country, beautiful Jamaica, to participate in the first part of the thirty-first session of the Council of the International Seabed Authority.

I thank you for your continued engagement and steadfast commitment to our work. I look forward to your deliberations in the days ahead, guided by a shared sense of responsibility and common purpose.

Allow me also to express my sincere appreciation to our outgoing President, His Excellency, Ambassador Duncan Laki, for his steady leadership, dedication, and commitment in guiding the work of the Council over the past session.

Mr. President, Distinguished delegates,

We meet at a consequential moment, for the Authority and for the broader system of consolidated ocean governance. Our decisions and deliberations of this Council unfold against a global backdrop that underscores, more than ever, the enduring importance of multilateralism, cooperation and dialogue.

At a time marked by complex global challenges and geopolitical realities, the ISA stands as a tangible expression of the international community's collective commitment to the rule of law at the international level – and in particular, to the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1994 Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the Convention.

The Convention mandate entrusted to us reflects a solemn undertaking: to ensure that activities in the Area are carried out for the benefit of humankind as a whole, and for peaceful purposes, within a robust legal framework grounded in equity, the best available scientific evidence, protection of the marine environment, responsibility and accountability. In this sense, the work of this Council is instrumental in delivering the Regulations.

The credibility of the Authority, and indeed of multilateral ocean governance, rests on our collective ability to translate UNCLOS' principles into practice through implementable rules.

Today, multilateralism and ocean governance face fragmentation, unilateral approaches and erosion of trust. Rules are the answer. Rules which are fair, based on consensus, and that can deliver protection and sustainable use of the ocean.

UNCLOS mandates that we need these rules. Without rules, there are no enforceable protections. The chance to have these in place before activities commence is unique in human history. This does not mean less ambition, less protection or a rush to mining, it means a tangible pathway to realized and holistic ocean governance.

Mr. President, Distinguished delegates,

In this context, the Council may wish to consider three ideas:

First, maintaining our focus on finalising the draft exploitation regulations. We must advance in a disciplined and efficient manner, building on intersessional progress even if this requires going an extra mile.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the leadership and dedication of the facilitators of the Informal Working Groups and the Friends of the President, whose efforts have helped maintain momentum between sessions. I welcome the substantive textual proposals, which have been incorporated into the Further Revised Consolidated Text.

Second, considering whether the priority should be given to the adoption of the draft Regulations on exploitation.

This approach offers an opportunity to lock in agreement on the core regulations and will provide legal certainty and predictability, while enabling Standards and Guidelines -- including environmental monitoring, reporting obligations, and inspection mechanisms -- to evolve as an adaptive technical instrument, updated as science, technology and best practices develop.

It is important to recall that the adoption of the exploitation regulations does not mean the immediate commencement of exploitation.

The regulatory system under UNCLOS operates in several stages.

The Council must adopt the Regulations establishing the legal framework governing activities in the Area.

However, a full governance system needs to be in place to ensure the realisation of the principle of the common heritage of humankind, through the elaboration of the highest technical standards and the adoption of rules on the equitable sharing of benefit in accordance with the Convention.

Third, the ISA needs to be equipped to collaborate in the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement. For either to succeed both must succeed now, requiring consolidated ocean governance that will allow us to sustainably manage areas beyond national jurisdiction,

from surface to deep seabed. The Secretariat will participate in the upcoming Preparatory Commission session and remain committed to ensuring interoperability of the two regimes.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

Beyond the regulatory negotiations, the Authority continues to advance its broader mandate; required obligations on science and capacity building. Through the implementation of the Marine Scientific Research Action Plan, as well as capacity-building initiatives, the Authority is strengthening delivery in the areas of scientific knowledge and technology transfer.

These initiatives are helping to ensure that developing States are meaningfully supported in building the scientific and institutional capacities necessary to participate effectively in activities in the Area.

In accordance with the mandates entrusted to the Secretariat by the Council in July 2025, we have worked diligently on key elements necessary to facilitate your deliberations. We have delivered:

- The Further Revised Consolidated Text of the draft exploitation regulations and the related documents;
- The draft indicative list of outstanding thematic issues; and
- The Indicative Programme of Work.

The Secretariat has also submitted a report on election mechanisms for the Economic Planning Commission and further advanced the work related to benefit-sharing mechanisms, a core expression of the common heritage principle.

I welcome the progress achieved on Regional Environmental Management Plans (REMPS), and on the development of environmental thresholds. This work has been advancing and will support risk-based and implementable regulations.

The Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative and the Deep-sea Biobank are supporting taxonomic description, data access and capacity development, especially for developing States.

We also continue to prioritise gender parity and the safe participation of women at sea via the See her Exceed (S.H.E.) programme; including its possible expansion into the legal field.

I'm delighted to highlight that in 2024–25, contractors provided more than 80 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 centres of excellence, including the ISA-China and Egypt Joint Training and Research Centres, and the newly inaugurated African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy, we are advancing knowledge of law and science in the Global South in truly meaningful ways.

I also wish to express sincere appreciation to those Member States who have provided extrabudgetary contributions received in support of these efforts and to the Voluntary Trust Fund which helps ensuring the participation of experts from developing countries in the meetings of the Commission and the Finance Committee.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

This session must bring us closer to a clear objective: the completion of a regulatory framework that is robust, balanced and implementable. The credibility of the Authority, and indeed of multilateral ocean governance, rests on our collective ability to translate principle into practice.

Maintaining focus on finalising the draft exploitation regulations therefore remains imperative. The timely completion of this framework would demonstrate that multilateral processes, even when complex and technically demanding, are capable of delivering responsible, fit for purpose and forward-looking outcomes.

Mr. President,

Environmental stewardship remains central to our mandate. I welcome the progress achieved in the last session, and during the intersessional period, in further elaborating the precautionary approach at the heart of UNCLOS.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

Success depends on sustained engagement, good faith negotiations and a shared understanding of our collective responsibility under the principle of the common heritage of humankind.

The Secretariat remains fully committed to supporting the Council in achieving clear and decision outcomes during this session.

As we commence, I encourage delegations to engage in a constructive and forward-looking manner, mindful of the collective responsibility entrusted to this Council.

I thank you, Mr. President, and all delegates.