

# **Report of the Secretary-General on the Mission to the Republic of Cameroon (9-13 February 2026, Yaoundé)**

## **I. Introduction**

At the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Cameroon, I undertook an official mission to Yaoundé from 9 to 13 February 2026. The visit was conceived as a forward-looking engagement, grounded in partnership, institutional strengthening and shared responsibility for the governance of the Area.

The mission had three principal objectives.

First, to deliver officially launch in-person training programme of the African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy (ADSEA), a capacity development initiative designed to enhance the effective participation of African Member States in the work of the International Seabed Authority (ISA).

Second, to engage in high-level bilateral consultations with the Government of Cameroon, with a view to reinforcing constructive cooperation, strengthening coordination within the African Group and supporting a coherent and informed approach to ongoing regulatory discussions.

Third, to advance dialogue on Africa's coordinated participation in the work of the ISA, including the continued progress towards the completion of the regulatory framework for activities in the Area, in a manner that reflects the principles of equity, environmental stewardship and the Common Heritage of [Hu]mankind.

The mission was undertaken in a spirit of engagement and due regard for the needs and priorities expressed by Member States. It sought to consolidate capacity, encourage preparedness and reinforce confidence in the institutional processes of the ISA at a time when predictable, rules-based multilateral governance remains essential.

The present report is submitted to the Council to inform members of the activities undertaken and the outcomes achieved during the mission.

## **II. African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy – In-Person Training Programme**

The inaugural in-person training programme of the African Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy (ADSEA) was held from 9 to 13 February 2026 at the International Relations Institute of Cameroon in Yaoundé. Through the support of the Partnership Fund, the programme brought together 26 diplomats, government officials and policymakers from 16 African States, representing all five African sub-regions, reflecting a broad and balanced continental engagement.

The ADSEA training programme was established in line with the Memorandum of understanding between the International Seabed Authority and the International Relations Institute of Cameroon concerning the establishment of a curriculum on the law of the sea and part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which was approved by the Assembly during the 28<sup>th</sup> session. The training programme of ADSEA was developed in response to priorities articulated by African Member States: the need for strengthened institutional preparedness, greater technical familiarity with the seabed regime and more coordinated participation in the deliberative processes of the ISA. The ADSEA marked an important step towards translating those priorities into practical and sustained capacity development.

## **1. Objectives of the Programme**

The programme was designed to reinforce the ability of African Member States to participate effectively, confidently and constructively in the work of the ISA. Its objectives were to

- enhance the knowledge base and negotiation capacity of African States in matters related to seabed resources in the Area based on their capacity development needs;
- promote informed and balanced participation of African countries in ISA-related activities and processes;
- support early to mid-career professionals with technical training in ocean governance.

The overarching aim was not merely to transfer information, but to consolidate institutional confidence and collective readiness.

## **2. Structure and Content**

The ADSEA in-person training built upon the conceptual knowledge that was acquired by participants during an online training phase held between September and December through the Deep Dive E Learning platform. While the online training programme served as a critical preparatory stage, the in-person training immersed participants in intensive, expert led sessions, practical simulations, negotiations, and group work, allowing for deep engagement, real time feedback, and collaborative learning among participants and experts. The training programme followed a logical progression from foundational legal principles to more technical and procedural aspects of the regulatory framework.

The substantive components included

- an overview of UNCLOS and the regime of the Area, including the mandate and functions of the ISA
- the rules of procedure and decision-making processes of the Assembly, Council and Legal and Technical Commission
- an introduction to the Economic Planning Commission, including discussion of its functions and draft rules of procedure of the Economic Planning Commission
- overview of the exploration regulations, including the obligations of contractors and sponsoring States
- status and thematic issues under consideration in the draft exploitation regulations, as well as associated draft standards and guidelines
- presentations on the Enterprise, including its legal basis and potential modalities for joint ventures
- discussion of the equitable sharing of financial and other economic benefits derived from activities in the Area
- introduction of the concept of the Common Heritage Fund.

The programme incorporated a series of simulation exercises designed to mirror actual ISA processes. These included

- preparation and negotiation of applications for approval of plans of work for exploration
- drafting Rules of Procedures for the Economic Planning Commission.

The final day was dedicated to group presentations on Africa's capacity-building needs, followed by a structured debrief and certificate ceremony. This closing segment allowed participants to consolidate lessons learned and articulate forward-looking recommendations.

### **3. Outcomes and Achievements**

The in-person ADSEA workshop yielded tangible and constructive outcomes.

First, participants demonstrated a strengthened understanding of procedural dynamics within the Council framework, including the importance of consensus-building and careful drafting. The negotiation simulations provided practical insight into the interplay between legal, technical and policy considerations.

Second, there was enhanced substantive familiarity with the regulatory process. Discussions on the draft exploitation regulations, associated standards and guidelines and economic mechanisms contributed to more technically grounded engagement.

Third, deliberations on the Enterprise and benefit-sharing mechanisms clarified their relevance as operational expressions of the common heritage of [hu]mankind. Participants explored how these mechanisms may support equitable participation and long-term development objectives.

Fourth, the group discussions enabled a structured identification of priority needs for capacity-building. These included economic analysis and modelling, environmental baseline data interpretation, financial terms and benefit-sharing arrangements and advanced legal drafting skills. This mapping provides a useful basis for the continued evolution of ADSEA.

Fifth, the inaugural cohort reflected meaningful participation of women diplomats and policymakers, reinforcing the ISA's commitment to gender equality and inclusive governance in ocean affairs.

The decision of Cameroon to host the first in-person ADSEA training session represents a significant institutional contribution to sustained African engagement in seabed governance. It signals readiness to anchor long-term capacity-building efforts within the continent and to contribute constructively to the work of the ISA.

Overall, the ADSEA programme demonstrated that structured, demand-driven capacity development strengthens not only individual expertise, but also collective confidence in multilateral processes. It constitutes an investment in informed participation, regulatory coherence and the effective realization of the ISA's mandate.

### **III. Discussion on the Role and Place of Africa within the ISA**

As part of the launching ceremony of the ADSEA programme, a panel discussion was convened under the theme: *"The Role and Place of Africa within the ISA: How can the continent make the most of the mechanisms established by the 1994 Agreement?"*

The discussion was substantive, forward-looking and grounded in a shared commitment to strengthening Africa's engagement within the institutional framework of the ISA. It provided an

opportunity to reflect not only on Africa's historical contribution to the seabed regime but also on the practical steps needed to consolidate sustained and coordinated participation.

Several key messages emerged.

First, the discussion recalled Africa's foundational role in shaping Part XI of the UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement. African States were central to the articulation of the principle of the common heritage of humankind and to the institutional design that underpins the ISA today. This historical contribution is integral to the legitimacy of the seabed regime.

Second, participants emphasized the importance of translating that legacy into structured and consistent influence in contemporary deliberations. Sustained engagement within the African Group, informed by technical preparedness and strategic coordination, was identified as essential to ensuring that Africa's perspectives are effectively reflected in ongoing regulatory discussions.

Third, it was recognized that effective multilateralism requires preparedness. Meaningful participation in the Assembly, Council and subsidiary bodies depends on technical expertise, legal understanding, economic literacy and interministerial coordination at the national level. Capacity development was therefore framed not as an ancillary activity, but as a prerequisite for full and constructive engagement.

Fourth, the discussion highlighted Africa's role as a stabilizing force within the governance architecture of the ISA. Coordinated and well-prepared engagement contributes to predictability, legal certainty and institutional balance. In this regard, Africa's participation strengthens the collective credibility of the regulatory process.

Fifth, there was broad convergence on the importance of advancing the completion of the regulatory framework for activities in the Area. Participants underscored that a clear, coherent and balanced framework is indispensable to ensuring environmental stewardship, equitable benefit-sharing and legal predictability for all stakeholders.

The overall tenor of the discussion reaffirmed that Africa is not a peripheral actor within the seabed regime. Rather, it is a central stakeholder whose historical role, demographic weight and development aspirations position it as a key contributor to the responsible governance of the Area. The dialogue in Yaoundé demonstrated a clear commitment to deepening that engagement in a constructive and forward-looking manner.

#### **IV. Bilateral Meetings**

During the mission, I held high-level consultations with senior representatives of the Government of Cameroon. These exchanges were conducted in a spirit of partnership and constructive dialogue, with a shared focus on strengthening Africa's engagement within the ISA and advancing responsible governance of the Area.

##### **1. Meeting with the Prime Minister and the Head of Government of Cameroon, Chief H.E. Dr. Joseph Dion NGUTE**

I had the honour of being received by the Prime Minister during the mission.

The discussion was both principled and forward-looking. The Prime Minister reaffirmed

- Cameroon's commitment to international law and collective governance

- the necessity that activities in the Area be conducted responsibly, equitably and in full accordance with UNCLOS
- the importance of ensuring that African States participate meaningfully in shaping the future evolution of the seabed regime.

The meeting conveyed a strong political signal of support for multilateral cooperation and for the ISA's mandate, at a time when predictable, rules-based governance remains critical.

## **2. Meeting with the Secretary-General of the Presidency – Minister of State Mr. Ferdinand Ngoh NGOH**

In my meeting with the Secretary-General of the Presidency, we discussed the broader strategic context of ocean governance within Cameroon's national development vision and Africa's collective role within the ISA.

The exchange focused on

- the relevance of ocean governance and seabed policy within long-term development planning
- Africa's coordinated influence within the institutional architecture of the ISA
- the importance of completing the regulatory framework in a manner that ensures predictability, equity and environmental responsibility
- the potential for anchoring ADSEA in Yaoundé as a sustainable platform for continental capacity development.

The meeting underscored the Presidency's clear support for rules-based multilateralism and for the careful stewardship of the global commons in accordance with international law.

## **3. Meeting with the Minister Delegate at the Ministry of External Relations Mr. Felix MBAYU**

My meeting with the Minister Delegate provided an opportunity to discuss the strategic importance of coordinated African engagement within the ISA framework.

Discussions focused particularly on

- strengthening coordination within the African Group to promote coherent and informed participation in the ISA's deliberations
- supporting continued capacity-building initiatives beyond ADSEA, including training opportunities and institutional partnerships aimed at reinforcing technical and legal preparedness
- ensuring that African States are equipped to engage substantively in the ongoing work towards completion of the exploitation regulations.

The Minister reaffirmed Cameroon's commitment to multilateral cooperation and to the responsible, equitable and rules-based governance of activities in the Area. The exchange reflected a shared understanding that institutional preparedness and coordinated engagement are essential to realizing the objectives of the common heritage of [hu]mankind.

Overall, the bilateral engagements reflected a shared commitment to strengthening Africa's constructive role within the ISA, reinforcing institutional capacity and advancing a balanced and inclusive approach to the governance of the Area.

## **V. Engagement with the United Nations System**

During the mission, I met with the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Cameroon to explore avenues for strengthened cooperation within the United Nations System. The discussion was guided by the recognition that ocean governance, including the regime of the Area, is intrinsically linked to broader sustainable development objectives.

The exchange highlighted the interconnections between responsible seabed governance, climate action, marine environmental protection and the development of a sustainable blue economy. It also underscored the importance of ensuring that governance of the Area is understood not in isolation but as part of an integrated multilateral framework contributing to economic resilience, environmental stewardship and social inclusion.

Particular attention was given to opportunities for enhanced coordination in areas such as capacity development, science-policy integration and support to developing States. Strengthened collaboration at the country and regional levels can help ensure that Member States are better equipped to translate global ocean governance commitments into national development strategies.

This engagement contributes to aligning the ISA's work with the Sustainable Development Goals, with an emphasis on SDGs 8, 9, 10, 14 and 16, while reinforcing coherence and complementarity across multilateral institutions. It reflects the ISA's commitment to constructive partnership within the United Nations System and to advancing its mandate in a manner consistent with the broader objectives of sustainable and inclusive development.

## **VI. Overall Assessment**

The mission to Cameroon yielded substantive and forward-looking outcomes that reinforce both the institutional mandate of the ISA and the constructive engagement of its Member States.

First, in the area of capacity-building, the successful launch of the in-person ADSEA training represents more than a single event. It marks the consolidation of a structured, demand-driven platform designed to support sustained African participation in the work of the ISA. The value of ADSEA lies not only in its inaugural training session, but in the continuity of activities to be developed with the support of the ISA. Ongoing training, thematic follow-up sessions, peer networks and targeted technical assistance will be essential to maintaining momentum and translating training into durable institutional capacity.

Ensuring continuity will allow ADSEA to evolve as a long-term instrument of preparedness, supporting African Member States in engaging effectively with the Assembly, Council and subsidiary bodies and in contributing substantively to the completion and implementation of the regulatory framework. The experience in ADSEA demonstrates the effectiveness of structured, simulation-based learning and coordinated regional engagement. It provides a practical model that may, in due course and subject to Member States' interest, be adapted and replicated in the context of other regional groups of the ISA, in a manner responsive to their specific priorities and capacity needs.

Second, at the political level, high-level meetings reaffirmed Cameroon's commitment to UNCLOS and to the collective governance of the Area. The clear and principled support

expressed for multilateralism, legal predictability and equitable stewardship of the global commons contributes to institutional stability and reinforces confidence in the ISA's processes.

Third, the mission emphasized the strategic positioning of Africa within the ISA. The discussions in Yaoundé underscored Africa's role as a constructive and stabilizing force within the institutional architecture of the ISA. Coordinated and well-prepared engagement by African States strengthens deliberations, promotes balanced outcomes and supports progress towards finalizing the regulatory framework in a manner that reflects environmental responsibility, equity and legal certainty.

Overall, the mission demonstrated that inclusive, capacity-driven engagement enhances both the legitimacy and effectiveness of the ISA. The work initiated in Yaoundé represents an investment in equitable participation, institutional resilience and the responsible governance of the common heritage of [hu]mankind. It also illustrates how a sustained partnership between the Secretariat and Member States can translate shared principles into practical and forward-looking action.

**Submitted by:**

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