



Part II of the 31st Session of the International Seabed Authority

Council

Opening Remarks by

H.E. Madam Leticia Carvalho

Secretary-General, International Seabeds Authority

Kingston, Jamaica, 13 July 2026.

Excellencies,

Mr. President,

Distinguished delegates,

Dear colleagues and friends,

Good morning, and welcome back to Kingston.

It is a great pleasure to see this room full again, and to welcome you once more to the headquarters of the International Seabed Authority for the second part of the thirty-first session of the Council.

As always, I thank the Government and people of beautiful Jamaica for their generosity, hospitality and continued support to the Authority as our host country. And to the delegates and observers joining us for the first time this session: a very warm welcome.

Excellencies,

It was here in Jamaica, at Montego Bay, that the Convention was opened for signature in December 1982 signed by 119 States on the very first day, something never before seen in the history of international law: States from North and South, East and West, coastal and land-locked alike. More than four decades later, it stands as a nearly universal framework, with 172 Parties. But its authority lies not only in that number. It lies in what these Parties have accepted: a comprehensive legal order for the sea, famously described as a constitution for the oceans.

What the international community built then, it built here, in Jamaica. And from Kingston, this Authority carries that promise forward every day.

Now, that promise began with a question.

In November 1967, Arvid Pardo stood before the United Nations General Assembly and asked something the world had not yet answered: how should the deep seabed be governed, and in whose interest?

The answer became one of the boldest ideas in modern international law: that the Area and its resources are the common heritage of humankind. That they belong to all, and to no one alone. That idea became Part XI of the Convention. It became this Authority. And it is the reason the members of this Council carry, together, responsibilities over more than half of the world's ocean floor.

I began here because that question is no longer historical.

Today, it has returned with renewed urgency, shaped by growing demand for the minerals of the energy transition, by the evolving strategic priorities of States, and by wider debates about the strength of multilateral rules themselves.

And at such a moment, our answer must be just as clear as it was then: the Convention remains the framework; the Area and its resources remain the common heritage of humankind, and protecting the mandate of this Authority matters now more than ever.

So, what I wish to bring into this room today is, above all, a spirit. The spirit of Montego Bay, the conviction, proven in this country more than four decades ago, that even the most difficult questions about ocean governance can be answered through law, through dialogue, and through the consensus that is required by this Convention.

Whether, when and under what conditions activities in the Area may proceed, are decisions that belong exclusively to you, the Member States, acting through the organs of the Authority in accordance with the Convention and the 1994 Agreement. From my first day in office, I have consistently maintained one perspective, both within this Council and in my public statements: the deep seabed needs rules, now, through a clear, effective and internationally agreed regulatory framework. Recent developments outside the multilateral process only reinforce the importance of advancing this objective. They remind us that prolonged uncertainty may create legal, institutional and practical challenges that underscore the value of a predictable, transparent and universally accepted framework established under the Convention.

For this reason, I continue to believe that the strongest response is not uncertainty, but rules; rules that are science-based, implementable and enforceable, supported by standards, by strengthened regional environmental management plans, and by robust monitoring and

compliance; rules that provide legal certainty for all – public and private - stakeholders while ensuring the effective protection of the marine environment and safeguarding the Area and its resources as the common heritage of humankind. And we are making progress.

This is, ultimately, the responsibility entrusted to this Authority under the Convention. It is also why the work of this Council is so important; not only for the Authority itself, but for the continued credibility and effectiveness of the multilateral legal order governing the oceans.

Because the common heritage of humankind cannot remain only a principle we discuss. The deep seabed belongs to no single country and no corporation; it belongs to all of us. And if we lose sight of this, we risk repeating on the ocean floor the same injustices and destruction we still strive to remedy on land.

This is why the strongest way to defend the Convention is through rules -- rules anchored in fairness, equity and science, and capable of timely implementation.

This, dear colleagues, is the work of these two weeks.

Before turning to the substance of the session, let me first express my sincere appreciation.

I am grateful to you, Mr. President, for your leadership and close engagement throughout the intersessional period. To the facilitators of the Informal Working Groups and the Friends of the President groups much of what kept this process moving between sessions is owed to you.

And to all delegations, your written submissions, your patience, your willingness, and intersessional work, to keep engaging through a demanding process, that is what has carried this work forward. It demonstrates that we don't stop because things get tough.

As mandated by the Council, the Secretariat has delivered Revision 3 of the Further Revised Consolidated Text of the draft exploitation regulations, together with the revised list of outstanding issues.

This was the first time the Council entrusted the Secretariat with the consolidated text, and the team has worked hard to honor that trust. I have seen firsthand, the hours behind this document, and I am proud of what this house has delivered. My thanks go to the Office of Legal Affairs and colleagues across the Secretariat, who prepared these documents with dedication and professionalism, within the timelines established by the Council.

The documents now before you show that the Council is moving from broad conceptual discussions towards the remaining policy choices – those that only you, Member States, can decide on.

The objective for this session should be clear: to define a credible path towards regulations that are robust, balanced and capable of implementation.

But regulations alone do not make a governance system. They must be carried into practice, grounded in science, administered with integrity, and implemented by an institution equipped for the task. That, in essence, is the rest of your agenda.

To this end, I wish to underline that promoting marine scientific research in the Area and capacity-building are integral parts of the Authority's mandate under the Convention. By advancing scientific knowledge and strengthening technical and institutional capacities, particularly in developing States, the Authority helps ensure that decisions concerning activities in the Area are informed by the best available science and that all members are able to participate effectively in fulfilling the common heritage of humankind.

I recall that the Assembly in its 26th session adopted the Action Plan of the Authority in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (ISBA/26/A/4). Under this Action Plan, the Secretariat has been developing practical initiatives that generate knowledge, develop innovative tools, enhance equitable access to knowledge and data, and build scientific capacity. For example, the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative has been advancing deep-sea taxonomy, describing new deep-sea species to improve the fundamental knowledge for assessing deep-sea biodiversity. The Deep-sea Biobank Initiative, which aims to facilitate global access to deep-sea biological samples and genetic data, has been progressing with developing standard operating procedures for sampling, processing and sharing of these valuable resources.

These initiatives produce tangible outcomes today while building the knowledge, partnerships and capacities needed to ensure effective participation by all countries, and particularly developing states. In doing so, they not only reinforce the work of the Authority grounded in robust science, but also support the broader global ocean governance, demonstrating their far-reaching value and contribution to ensuring complementarity between various mandates and activities towards common objectives.

Many of these initiatives are made possible through the generous contributions of member States, scientific institutions, and other stakeholders of the Authority. I wish to express my sincere appreciation for their continued support and encourage all of you to join these collaborative efforts.

In this respect, the continued work of the Legal and Technical Commission on the development of standards and guidelines will be particularly important. They will assist the Council in determining how the regulations are carried into practice, while allowing technical instruments to evolve as science, technology and best practices develop.

Environmental stewardship also remains central to this work. Progress on Regional Environmental Management Plans, environmental thresholds, cumulative impacts, DeepData, and standards

and guidelines will support risk-based and implementable regulations, grounded in the best available scientific evidence and the precautionary approach.

The Council will receive the report from the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission on its work on these important matters, in addition to reviewing annual reports of exploration contractors to support the Council's effective oversight of contractors' activities.

The Council will also consider my reports on the status of exploration contracts, developments concerning national legislation relating to activities in the Area, and the implementation of the Council's 2025 decision concerning the reports of the Chair of the Commission.

These matters are part of how the Authority ensures that the existing exploration regime continues to be administered with transparency, responsibility and accountability. I give a huge debt of gratitude to the Chair of the LTC, and its members, for their unwavering commitment and hard work in advance of this Council.

The Council will also receive the report of the Finance Committee, together with the proposed programme budget for 2027–2028.

This budget should be considered as part of the same governance discussion. A regulatory framework, however carefully negotiated, must be supported by an institution capable of executing it.

As I communicated to the Finance Committee, the proposal seeks to reconcile two equally important requirements: prudence and readiness. Prudence, because the Authority must manage the contributions of Member States carefully, responsibly and transparently. Readiness, because essential expertise, procedures and systems cannot be built only at the moment they become required.

I thank the Finance Committee for their hard work and expertise and look forward to the Council's consideration of their recommendations.

Finally, two further matters may assist the Council in organizing its work going forward.

First, the Council may wish to consider whether a third part of the thirty-first session would be useful to advance the remaining issues before it. Should the Council consider that an additional part of the session would assist its work, the Secretariat stands ready to provide the necessary support.

Second, under the thematic approach adopted by the Council, this session is also expected to provide greater clarity on the Council's work in 2027, including for the adoption of a roadmap for the year ahead. Such clarity would support planning by delegations, capitals, facilitators and the

Secretariat, and help ensure that the work continues in an orderly, transparent and predictable manner.

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

The work before you is complex and it carries consequences well beyond this room. But at its heart, the task is clear. The common heritage is not a slogan.

Et cette promesse, nous avons ensemble la responsabilité de la tenir. —

El patrimonio común de la humanidad no es una frase hecha. Es una promesa que nos hicimos los unos a los otros.

When the deep seabed was placed before the world as a question, the answer was the common heritage of humankind. This Council has in its power to give that answer practical effect, through rules that are fair, equitable, science-based, protective, implementable and timely.

This is how we honor those who negotiated our Convention: not by recalling their words, but by carrying their vision and work forward.

The Secretariat stands with you, Mr. President, and with every member of this Council, throughout these meetings.

I wish you every success in your deliberations, and a productive and constructive session.

I believe that the ISA is the only true solution for the productive, safeguarded, transparent and effective management of our deep sea global commons. I now hand the meeting back to his Excellency Ambassador Joshi.

Thank you. Merci beaucoup. Muchas gracias.