

Opening of the thirty-first session of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority



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

**Opening Remarks by Madam Leticia Carvalho
Secretary-General, International Seabed Authority**

Kingston, Jamaica, 27 July 2026.

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Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to the second part of the thirty-first session of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority, and it is an honour to do so.

Allow me to acknowledge the presence of H.R. Mr Surangel S. Whipps, J., President of the Republic of Palau, and H.E. the Honourable Lionel Rouwen

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Aingimea, Vice-President of the Republic of Naoero. It is truly an honour to welcome you to this session.

I am also delighted to welcome Mr. Arsenio Dominguez, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization. Mr. Secretary-General, thank you for accepting my invitation to join us here in Kingston. I believe that this is the first time an IMO Secretary-General has attended a session of our Assembly. Your presence marks an important moment in the relationship between our two organizations and is a great sign for what the future holds.

As always, I extend special thanks to our host country, beautiful Jamaica, which has played an integral role in fostering the spirit of international

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dialogue, diversity, respect for diverse voices and multilateralism that defines this institution.

As you move into the deliberations, I want to emphasize my huge debt of gratitude to outgoing President, Ambassador Gardiner for the exceptional work you have done over this last year to galvanize progress. Your elegant, calm and inclusive style has brought consensus on a number of challenging topics and on behalf of the entire Secretariat, it has been an absolute delight to work with you.

I am so heartened to see such strong representation from across our membership. Your presence reflects the continued importance that States

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place on the mandate of the Authority and on the responsibilities entrusted to it under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1994 Agreement.

As we come together following the conclusion of the Council Session and two intensive weeks of work. I would again like to thank the President of the Council, High Commissioner Mayank Joshi --- Excellency, thank you for your steady, patient and inclusive manner in which you guided the Council through a demanding agenda, and for your close engagement with delegations and the Secretariat through the session and the intersessional period, your leadership is greatly appreciated.

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My thanks also go to the excellent facilitators of the Informal Working Groups and the Friends of the President groups, and to all delegations for their written submissions, flexibility, intersessional engagement and sustained commitment throughout this demanding process. I wish in particular to commend the Council for the progress achieved in the continued elaboration of the rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation, and in advancing the wider governance framework of this Authority. I also welcome the adoption of the roadmap or resolving key outstanding issues, including through written proposals and comments

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during the intersessional period --- this provides a clear basis for maintaining the positive momentum achieved during this session.

I also wish to thank the Council for its continued trust in the Secretariat, reflected in its decision to entrust us with the preparation of the Advanced Negotiating Text. This is a significant responsibility, which we undertake with full commitment.

You will hear more about the Council's deliberations and outcomes from High Commissioner Joshi when he presents his statement later this week.

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I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the entire Secretariat team, whose dedicated support to Member States helped to make the Council session outcomes possible.

Distinguished delegates,

The indicative programme of work before the Assembly reflects the scope and importance of this session. Let me highlight a few of the matters before you.

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You will consider 12 requests for observer status received by the Secretary-General. I believe that the growing number of these requests demonstrate increased interest in the work of the Authority and its unique mandate.

As decided by the Assembly at its thirtieth session, you will also examine proposed guidelines for applications for observer status submitted by contractors.

You will also be called upon to elect one member of the Finance Committee and to fill the vacancies on the Council.

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The Assembly will resume its consideration of the periodic review of the international regime of the Area under article 154 of the Convention. As I noted last year, this is an opportunity to take stock of how far we have come and to look ahead to how the Authority, and the Secretariat, can continue to fulfil the mandate and responsibilities entrusted to us by the Convention and the Member States. Indeed, an opportunity to increase the transparency and accountability that Member States are calling for.

During this session, I will present the annual report of the Secretary-General. The report provides a high-level overview of progress made in 2026, including updates on the Action Plan in support of the United Nations

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Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, an important framework for our collective work as an international community. It also covers progress on programmes, financial sustainability and resource mobilization and reforms to strengthen the Secretariat.

The Assembly will also be invited to consider the Council's recommendation of the proposed budget for the financial period 2027–2028.

The proposal is the outcome of extensive and diligent work undertaken by the Finance Committee and the Council, with the support of the Secretariat. It strikes a diligent balance between fiscal responsibility and

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the need to respond to the requirements of the work ahead, to advance the regulations, while enabling the continuation and strengthening of essential programmes.

Please allow me to bring to your attention here that during Council, nearly all countries acknowledged the substantial increase in workload of the LTC and Finance Committee during Sessions, as well as intersessionally. I would respectfully submit that with the increase of workload across the organs it follows that the cross-cutting work of the Secretariat across, legal, technical, administrative, as well as communications and outreach functions, both during Session, and intersessionally, is also increased.

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We remain deeply committed to the full servicing of all organs of the ISA, and deeply appreciative of their invaluable work. Therefore, I express deep gratitude for the Council's recommendation on the budget. I look forward to your approval at this Assembly.

Finally, the Assembly will consider whether to explore a request for an Advisory Opinion from the Seabed Disputes Chamber of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea pursuant to article 191 of the Convention. The inclusion of this item has been proposed by the Secretary-General of the Authority in line with the rules of procedure of the Assembly. I look forward to introducing this topic in more detail when we discuss Item 17.

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In closing, I take the opportunity to express sincere gratitude to Ireland for the coverage of the IISD/ENB for this session and make an appeal to both Member States and Observers to provide funding for this important service that helps ensure the transparency and accountability that Member States, and the global community, are demanding from us.

I invite you to please join me for the high level event, *The New Era of ISA's Global Mentoring Programme - SHE – See her Exceed*, today at 1:15 here in plenary. A great opportunity for your to take stock of this important initiative.

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On behalf of the work of the Secretariat, I wish the very best to all Assembly members in your work on the demanding agenda before you. You can count on our support at every necessary step in your deliberations.

I thank you.

