

International Seabed Authority

Press Release



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SEABED ASSEMBLY CONTINUES DEBATE ON SECRETARY-GENERAL'S REPORT HEARS 17 STATEMENTS ON A RANGE OF ISSUES OF CONCERN TO STATES MEMBERS OF AUTHORITY

The Assembly of the International Seabed Authority, considering the report of Secretary-General Nii Allotey Odunton (Ghana) in Kingston, this morning, heard 17 interventions on a range of issues, including the need for speedy adoption of the draft regulations on polymetallic sulphides, promotion of training of scientists from developing countries through the Endowment Fund for Marine Scientific Research and the need for more technical workshops and regional sensitization seminars.

The Secretary-General's report (ISBA/16/A/2) provides a detailed account of the Authority's work over the past year as well as the main trends of the 2011-2013 proposed programme of work.

Statements in the debate were made by the representatives of Mexico, India, Namibia, Argentina, Senegal, Japan, Côte d'Ivoire, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Spain, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Ghana, Uganda, Cameroon, Brazil and Jamaica.

The Assembly will meet next on Wednesday, 5 May at 10 a.m. to conclude its consideration of the Secretary-General's report.

Mexico began the discussions by urging members to exert their best efforts to advance the work on the regulations for polymetallic sulphides to allow for the beneficial utilization of marine resources in a sustainable manner. Other delegations, including Côte d'Ivoire, India, Namibia, and Nigeria, echoed this call. Namibia underscored the need for the spirit of compromise and flexibility to prevail if the outstanding issues were to be resolved.

The Mexican representative spoke of the importance of the Endowment Fund for Marine Scientific Research in the Area, and suggested that in processing applications for awards, particular attention should be paid to promoting participation in international expeditions by developing countries closest to the areas under investigation. She further noted that, as the

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Secretary-General's report indicated, the general consensus was that the present level of knowledge about the ecology of the deep seas was insufficient for a conclusive evaluation of the risk posed by large-scale commercial exploitation, compared with exploration activities. For that reason, technical workshops proposed by the Authority were of utmost importance in the quest to protect and preserve the marine environment.

The Mexican representative said that the core responsibility for marine biodiversity-related issues in areas beyond national jurisdiction, including the possibility of establishing protected marine areas, fell to the United Nations General Assembly, working through its Informal Ad Hoc Open-Ended Working Group. It was entrusted with the task of studying issues related to the sustainable utilization and conservation of marine biodiversity beyond the areas of national jurisdiction.

The importance of scientific research for the better management of the marine environment was endorsed by India which welcomed the initiation of work to establish a model Central Indian Ocean basin based on the now completed project to develop a geological model of polymetallic nodule deposits in the Clarion-Clipperton fracture zone. The representative pledged the full support of his government in this new project.

Senegal's representative said that his country had not lost sight of the fact that during the sixty-third Session of the United Nations Organization General Assembly, and in particular during the general debate on Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, the issue of attendance at the Authority's meetings had once again been addressed. He quoted the relevant Assembly resolution which called upon the Authority to continue to pursue all options, including making concrete recommendations on the issue of dates to improve attendance and to ensure global participation.

He called for strengthened cooperation between the Authority and the Inter-governmental Oceanographic Commission of United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization (UNESCO). He also called for speedy conclusion of work in the Council on the draft regulations on polymetallic sulphides. He said the Authority should consider developing training programmes for young qualified experts from developing countries.

The representative of Japan said that the current global recession reduced the prospect of commercial mining in the near future. It was Japan's hope, however, that the draft regulations on polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferro-manganese crusts would facilitate activities in the Area. The regulations must address environmental aspects that might arise in the exploration of resources in the Area. Noting references made in the debate to the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles, he said the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, which is mandated by the Convention to consider this matter, had been handling submissions by coastal states well. Its independence and impartiality should be respected, he said.

The representative of Côte d'Ivoire welcomed the efforts of the Authority to promote training seminars especially targeting developing countries. He announced that his government would host in Yamoussoukro, at a date to be agreed with the Authority, a regional sensitization seminar on the activities being carried out in the Area. He added that Cote d'Ivoire intended to make a donation to the Endowment Fund before the end of 2010. With regard to the scale of

Assessments, his delegation supported the position of the Group of 77 and China as expressed at its meeting at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on April 23 that the existing scale should be retained. With regard to absenteeism in the Legal and Technical Commission, Cote d'Ivoire noted that the Authority should not be held responsible, but rather that the repeated absence of a member should be regarded as a resignation or dereliction of duty.

Bangladesh welcomed contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund and the Endowment Fund which helped developing countries. Its representative noted the importance of the current session in the efforts to finalize texts on regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the Area. He said the interests of the private sector in seabed mining could be advanced if the texts were completed during the current session. He called for more technical workshops and regional seminars to enable scientists from developing countries to participate to gain useful and important scientific data on capacity-building programmes. Bangladesh supported the Authority's 2011-2013 work programme, including plans to digitize the Central Data Depository in addition to the bibliographic database.

Indonesia addressed the issue of the responsibility of the Authority under Article 82 of the Convention "to distribute to States parties to the Convention the payments of contributions in kind derived from exploitation of the non-living resources of the continental shelf extending beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines of the territorial sea". The representative welcomed the initiative to convene an expert group meeting to consider and help prepare draft recommendations to the Council and the Assembly on the implementation of Article 82 paragraph 4. Spain urged the members of the Authority to complete deliberations on the sulphides regulations by reaching agreement on the two outstanding issues. Spain was committed to playing a more active role in the progress of the Authority as evidenced by its organization of a sensitization seminar in February 2010.

Nigeria's representative announced his Government's decision to make a contribution to the Voluntary Trust Fund and the Endowment Fund for Marine Scientific Research in the Area. The amounts would be communicated to the secretariat in the "very near future", he added. Noting that the first commercial production of resources from the outer continental shelf was anticipated to be by 2015, he urged the establishment of a scheme for the distribution of potential payments and contributions by contractors who would be involved. Nigeria looked forward to the envisaged work on an exploitation code by the Authority, adding that its conclusion would reduce the uncertainties involved in the commercial production of metals from deep sea mining.

Nigeria encouraged the Authority to continue to organize sensitization seminars in various parts of the world, recalling the successful one that was held in his country last year. That seminar resulted in greater awareness of the activities of the Authority in Nigeria and in some other African countries, the Nigerian representative said.

The Russian Federation welcomed the conclusion of work on the project to develop a geological model for polymetallic nodule deposits in the Clarion-Clipperton fracture zone saying the model was important for future exploration in the Area. Russia said it would be prepared to play an active role in the Secretariat's preliminary study of issues associated with developing an exploitation code.

Ghana believed it was incumbent on all delegations, in a spirit of compromise and flexibility, to ensure the adoption of the regulations on polymetallic sulphides at the current session. Any further delay would undermine the progressive development of the Area as a common heritage of mankind and hamper the Authority's work. The final text ought to be fair, balanced and equitable, reflecting the mutual interests of all parties in accordance with the spirit and letter of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

He said the competent authorities in Ghana were giving careful consideration to the possibility of ratifying the 1994 Agreement and the Protocol on Immunities and Privileges before the end of this year.

Uganda welcomed Chad as a new member of the Authority and said that its decision, to become party to the Convention and the Agreement dispelled the notion that land-locked states had no concern with seabed activities.

Brazil expressed its satisfaction with the envisaged preliminary study of some issues associated with the development of an exploitation code during the Authority's 2011-2013 work programme. Brazil, with its long and successful experience in offshore oil and gas development, would be honoured to participate in the study that would be fundamentally significant to the Authority's future. Brazil's representative was also pleased with plans to convene, during the same work programme, an expert group meeting to help prepare recommendations to the Council and the Assembly on the implementation of article 82, paragraph 4, of the Convention. The Brazilian representative disclosed that his compatriot on the Legal and Technical Commission had already volunteered group to be a member of the expert.

Cameroon said new members to the Authority underscored the importance of the body to all nations. The representative thanked delegations for the expressions of condolence on the passing of the former head of its delegation, Paul Engo, who was also a Judge at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

On the programme of work of the Authority during the period 2011 – 2013, Argentina called for special emphasis on the monitoring of existing exploration contracts, so that the activity being undertaken by the contractors actually conformed with the provisions of the Convention, the 1994 Agreement, Regulations and environmental and financial guidelines adopted by the Authority. Argentina agreed with other delegations that although the timing of mining operation would be determined by its economic viability, the Authority had to move toward the adoption of rules for exploitation and environmental protection to prepare for such activity.

Jamaica said the proposal to establish a marine mineral museum at the Authority's headquarters, funded by contributions from member states and contractors, was timely as Jamaicans and the people of the Caribbean needed to know more about the work of the organization. On the assessed contributions by members to the Authority's budget, Jamaica said any methodology used to determine a scale must include consideration of current economic conditions and states' ability to pay.

Responding to the statements, Secretary-General, Nii Allotey Odunton (Ghana) expressed gratitude to delegations for supporting the work of the Secretariat and the Authority, particularly Cote d'Ivoire for its offer to host training and information seminars for developing states; the Russian Federation for the South Atlantic project; Brazil, for its offer to assist with a preliminary study of issues related to developing an exploitation code; Nigeria, for contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund and Endowment Fund. Mr. Odunton also listed cooperation from China sponsoring a masters' degree programme on the marine environment, an event to promote the Endowment Fund in New York in June, and workshops and sensitization seminars in Kingston as well as other activities supported by delegations.

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