

International Seabed Authority

Press Release



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Assembly (AM)

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ASSEMBLY DISCUSSES ANNUAL REPORT OF SECRETARY-GENERAL; APPOINTS CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE AND ELECTS VICE-PRESIDENTS

The Assembly of the International Seabed Authority meeting in Kingston today, began discussion of the annual report of the Secretary-General, elected its remaining vice-presidents and appointed nine members of its Credentials Committee.

The following were elected to complete the slate of four vice-presidents of the Assembly: the Republic of Korea, nominated by the Asian Group; The Netherlands, by the Western European and Other States, and Romania representing the Eastern European Group. Honduras was chosen by the Latin American and Caribbean States at the Assembly's first meeting on Monday, 9 July.

Vice-President. Lee Ho-Sung (Korea), chaired the meeting in the absence of the Assembly President, Chief Olufolajimi Modupe Akintola (Nigeria).

The Assembly also appointed its Credentials Committee, consisting of China, Guyana, Japan, Kenya, Malta, New Zealand, Panama, Poland and South Africa. The Committee will present a report to the Assembly next week.

The Assembly will next meet at 10 a.m. on Monday, 16 July to continue its discussion of the Secretary General's report on the work of the Authority.

Secretary-General's Report

The report of the Secretary-General (ISBA/A/13/2) reviews the Authority's 2005-2007 work programme and that for the next three years to 2010. The primary focus of the Authority's substantive work during 2008-2010 will, as in the past, be on the scientific and technical work necessary to carry out its functions, particularly the promotion of a better understanding of the potential environmental impacts of deep sea mining, when it takes place.

During the period 2008-2010, the Secretariat will continue to expand its Central Data Repository by augmenting its data and information, according to the report which was submitted to the Assembly under article 166, paragraph 4, of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The structure of the data base will be adjusted to cluster data and information by resource type, that is, polymetallic nodules, polymetallic sulphides, and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts. Environmental databases would be developed further to cover the three minerals. The Secretariat also proposes, during the period, to create biological databases for polymetallic sulphides and cobalt crusts for regions of commercial interest utilizing available public domain data and through collaborations. Work on a bibliographic database on polymetallic nodule resources has largely been completed. The database contains articles from 456 journals.

Three international workshops would be convened during the 2008-2010 work programme. The first would review the outcomes of the project to establish a geological model of polymetallic nodule deposits in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone. The second would ascertain the modalities for scientific collaboration on research into polymetallic sulphide deposits in the international seabed Area and potential sources of financing for such collaborations. The third workshop would address the standardization of the environmental data contained in the exploration code for polymetallic sulphides and would aim to develop guidelines for the establishment of environmental baselines for those resources. The objective was to facilitate the acquisition of comparable environmental data from potential contractors that would contribute to the establishment of a cohesive monitoring programme by the Authority.

With regard to the status of contributions to the Authority's budget, as at 30 June 2007, 82 per cent of the value of contributions to the 2007 budget due from member States and the European Community had been received.

By that same date, 51 members were in arrears for two years or more. Argentina, Kenya and Yemen had paid their arrears to bring the outstanding contributions down to \$302,218. The Authority's Working Capital Fund stands at the approved level of \$438,000 at 1 May 2007.

The report touches on the International Seabed Authority Endowment Fund for Marine Scientific Research in the Area (ISBA/12/A/11) which was established at the last session. The aim is to promote and encourage the conduct of marine scientific research in the international seabed area for the benefit of mankind as a whole. It was also to support the participation of qualified scientists and technical personnel from developing countries in marine research programmes.

On the Voluntary Trust Fund, the report observes that the participation of members of the Finance Committee and the Legal and Technical Commission from developing countries has improved. The trust fund was established in 2002 to help officials from those countries participate in the work of the two bodies. The total amount paid out of the Fund to date is \$120,166.

The trust fund is made up of voluntary contributions from the Authority's members and others. Over the life of the fund, contributions have been received from Angola (\$300), Brazil (\$10,000), Indonesia (\$1,000), Namibia (\$1,300), Nigeria (\$5,000), Norway (\$25,000), Oman

(\$10,000), Spain (\$20,018), Trinidad and Tobago (\$10,000), B. Aliyu Oon (\$500) and Dr. Y. Kazmin (\$200) bringing the total contributions to \$83,318.

The report states that in light of developments within the marine minerals sector, the Authority will begin to monitor more closely trends and developments relating to deep seabed mining activities, including world metal market conditions and metal prices, trends and prospects.

Finally, the report observes that in the year commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the opening for signature of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and with more than three quarters of the United Nations membership also being members of the Authority, the goal of universal participation is within reach.

However, it notes that a recurring problem for the Authority is poor attendance at the Authority's Assembly sessions. The report comments: "This is a serious problem. It is not good for the Authority's standing and undermines the credibility of the Authority". It states that considerable efforts have been made over the last few years to rationalize the meetings of the Assembly and reduce their length and frequency, but those efforts have not had the effect of increasing the level of participation.

It concludes that as the number of members of the Authority grows, the required quorum for its meetings becomes more difficult to achieve.

Discussion of the report

Commenting on the Authority's programme of work, China said it was pleased with its progress in providing the legal framework for deep seabed mining, but the representative cautioned against hasty formulation of regulations for new resources. China also urged the Authority to do whatever was necessary to ensure full participation in its work by developing countries.

On the composition of the Legal and Technical Commission, South Africa said that while it supported the Secretary-General's call for a more predictable process in the election of members to the Commission, his delegation could not support a reduction of membership from the current 25 to the original 15. Such an action, the representative said, would produce an imbalance in representation to the detriment of developing countries which were largely African. His view was shared by other delegations in the African Group. Senegal appealed for assurances about representation of developing countries on the Commission. It called for increased contribution to the Voluntary Trust Fund as one way to ensure their participation.

Senegal announced that it had established an embassy in Kingston, to join 23 other states with permanent missions to the Authority.

The concern about attendance at meetings of the Authority was the focus of many delegations during the discussion on the report of the Secretary-General. Nigeria said the poor attendance at sessions "connotes negativity." The representative suggested a survey of the membership by the Secretariat to gather information on reasons for such poor attendance.

In his contribution, Raymond Wolfe, President of the Council and Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the Authority, said his country, as was customary, had made every effort to fulfill its obligations to the Authority as host country.

His Government was currently in the process of considering a formal agreement with the Authority on employment of spouses of its staff members. He recalled the successful completion of consultations on the matter resulting in a mutually agreeable procedure for their employment. He hoped that the agreement would be finalized shortly.

He recalled his Government's decision to name the main conference room of the Jamaica Conference Centre as "The Kenneth Rattray Conference Room". A formal ceremony to honour the late Jamaican jurist would take place on Wednesday, 18 July. The International Seabed Authority has its headquarters at the Conference Centre.

India expressed support for the establishment of the Endowment Fund which would facilitate the participation of scientists from developing countries in marine scientific research programmes. He guaranteed India's active participation in future scientific research projects and conveyed his country's interest in hosting one of the technical workshops planned for the 2008-2010 work programme.

The United Kingdom joined South Africa in urging member States to pay their contributions in full so that the Authority could carry out its full range of functions. He commended the Authority on the depth of the scientific programmes undertaken.

Australia noted that the Authority was making an impressive contribution to global knowledge of the marine environment and expressed particular interest in the findings of unanticipated high levels of species diversity in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone.

Brazil announced that his country had made significant progress towards ratifying the 1994 Agreement. (The 1994 Agreement relates to the implementation of part XI (seabed provisions) of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea).

In his response, the Secretary-General suggested that the matter relating to the future size and composition of the Legal and Technical Commission could be discussed more fully at a later meeting, once his report on the issue (ISBA/13/C/2) was presented. With regard to the Endowment Fund, he noted that the draft terms of reference, guidelines and procedures for its use would be considered by the Finance Committee and submitted to Council and Assembly for approval during this session. The Secretary-General also took note of Nigeria's suggestion of a survey to ascertain reasons for members' absence from meetings and agreed to look into its feasibility.

In response to Senegal's call for greater linkages between the Authority's library and university libraries, the Secretary-General said the Authority had exchanged publications with institutions from that country and would welcome the establishment of any links with university libraries.