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AD HOC COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE PEACEFUL  
USES OF THE SEA-BED AND THE OCEAN  
FLOOR BEYOND THE LIMITS OF NATIONAL  
JURISDICTION

NOTE BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

In addition to the replies of Member Governments under operative paragraph 3 (a) of General Assembly resolution 2340 (XXII), communicated to the Ad Hoc Committee in documents A/AC.135/1 and Add.1 to 8, the Secretary-General has now received replies from the Governments of Nigeria and Italy.

The substantive parts of these replies are reproduced in the present document, in the order in which they were received, for the information of members of the Committee.

NIGERIA

[Original: English]  
6 June 1968

The Nigerian Government supports the resolution calling for the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee to study the feasibility and scope of the exclusive reservation of the sea-bed and ocean floor for peaceful purposes.

ITALY

[Original: English]  
16 July 1968

... has the honour to submit a memorandum containing further views of the Italian Government on the subject of the study to be prepared by the Ad Hoc Committee established under General Assembly resolution 2340 (XXII).

MEMORANDUM

1. Without any doubt, the sea-bed and ocean floor, and the subsoil thereof are a potential source of enormous resources for mankind. The considerable and rapid progress of technology will lead in the future to the exploration and exploitation of such resources at increasingly greater depths and under environmental conditions of a growing complexity.

Though the promises of the sea-bed are great and a remarkable progress has been achieved in the past fifteen years in the development of scientific knowledge and in technology, we are still far from having achieved certain fundamental goals.

If such goals are to be achieved and those promises fulfilled it seems necessary, first and foremost, to improve our scientific knowledge of the sea. In this connexion wider activities by all nations should be fostered in the field of scientific research and international co-operation should be improved and expanded.

Such scientific activities, the development of which requires adherence to the principle of freedom of research, will necessitate adequate investments and the use of the most advanced technology. They should be organized in such a way as to ensure the widest and fullest collection and co-ordination of data and their being made available to all countries.

If such an effort at co-ordinating scientific activities without hampering their free development were carried out, it might be possible to draw up, within a few years, a fairly accurate picture of the resources and potential of the sea-bed. At the same time, the expansion of scientific knowledge would certainly entail further developments in the technological field in view of the existing links between research activities and technological progress. In this connexion it appears certain that many of the complex technological and economic problems existing in this field arise from limited scientific knowledge.

2. Much has been said on the question of the limits of the continental shelf, the slope, the territorial waters and other elements relevant to the Ad Hoc Committee's work. The question is certainly one of great importance and an approach based on objective considerations drawn from physical realities might help in the search for solutions.

Oceanic space should not be considered as a homogenous entity. The seas are phenomena of such a magnitude that it is not possible, in the consideration of their features, to lose sight of their extremely diverse environmental conditions and of the wide differences they present from area to area under many standpoints (geological, geographical, biological, physical, chemical and so on).

If reference is made only to the basic geological features of the earth's crust, the following very broad classification is usually suggested:

- (a) oceanic areas characterized by enormous abyssal plains, circa 4,000 metres deep, and by an oceanic, simatic crust five to seven kilometres thick;
- (b) peri-oceanic slopes and plains, and internal and marginal seas, which present a different morphology, characterized mainly by continental or semi-continental crusts, the thickness of which ranges up to 60 kilometres, and by a considerably developed sial.

The preceding classification, the central element of which is the crust, is normally taken into consideration for practical purposes because the crust itself is the main target for exploitation activities.

But if all the features relevant for the work of the Ad Hoc Committee are taken into account a different classification can be more usefully considered, i.e.:

- (a) internal and marginal seas;
- (b) oceans.

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The latter classification, apart from its being justified by the very title of the item under consideration (where the expressions "sea-bed" and "ocean floor" are used), seems to be particularly fitting for the purposes of the examination of the question.

3. In this connexion, the following differential features justifying the latter classification may be underlined:

(a) geographical elements: they are self-evident. Internal and marginal seas are always well delimited and separated from the oceans by surrounding lands (continents, peninsulas, islands, insular arcs, etc.). The linkage between those seas and the oceans is usually narrow and incomplete (straits, channels, etc.).

(b) geological elements: in their stratigraphic, sedimentary and tectonic characteristics, the internal seas are the extension of the surrounding continents. Their geological history and their structural evolution are intimately connected and essentially identical with those of the emerged lands which surround them. In many a case the very existence of the sea was determined by the impact of local and occasional phenomena leading to mere differences in altitude (isostasy, erosion, lower sedimentation velocity). With regard to the crust features, it appears equally that internal seas are an extension of the surrounding continents (continental and semi-continental crusts). By comparison, the oceans' origin and geological evolution have been quite different (with the sole exception of the peri-oceanic shelves and slopes), as different are the structure and features of their crust (oceanic crust).

(c) oceanographic elements: the waters of internal seas present chemical features which are often independent of those prevalent in the oceans. Thus, marked differences are often to be found in their respective salinity as well as in the distribution of temperatures, in the currents' and streams' patterns, in evaporation and water stratification and so on.

(d) biological elements: very specific situations occur in the internal seas as far as organic life and its development are concerned; such conditions have a considerable bearing on fishing and on the quality and nature of the products of fishing.

(e) pollution: in view of the characteristically limited water circulation, pollution raises particularly dangerous problems in the internal and marginal seas,

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especially in connexion with the possible future exploitation of the resources of their sea-bed. Discharge of radioactive and oily wastes may create an abnormally concentrated pollution. By comparison, the very wide water circulation in the oceans considerably reduces such dangers.

(f) exploitation of mineral occurrences: the tectonic structures of the internal seas, their basins and sedimentary deposits, as well as the other geological factors relevant to exploration harmoniously relate to those of the surrounding lands: so much so that it is normally possible to forecast, with fair approximation, their orientation and extension as well as their specific features. It ensues that exploration in internal seas presents specific characteristics. On the other hand, the correlation between the emerged and submerged structures of the peri-oceanic shelves and slopes is often uncertain and sometimes anomalous. Finally the results that can be obtained from the exploration of the deep ocean, beyond the continental slope, cannot be accurately forecast in view of the present limited knowledge of those areas.

(g) other elements: internal seas are in many cases the sole area where States bordering on those seas can expect to carry out exploitative activities in the future. Such an area, however, is of limited size due to the usually narrow or moderate size of the internal seas themselves and to the rights of the other coastal States. In view of this, it seems natural that such countries should be inclined to arrive at agreed arrangements among themselves concerning the exploration and exploitation of mineral resources. The situation is quite different for coastal States bordering on the oceans, in view of the very size of the oceanic space.

4. In conclusion it appears that the problems of the exploration and exploitation of mineral resources in the internal and marginal seas are altogether distinct from those prevailing in the oceanic areas. It appears also that the coastal States bordering on such seas have many problems and objectives in common. Thus the prospects seem good for co-operation among said States in the exploration and use of those areas, taking also into account the mutual interest in preventing the creation of unwelcome occurrences (pollution in particular).

It seems therefore important that in any future examination of the question of the peaceful uses of the sea-bed and ocean floor beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, the problems of internal and marginal seas and those of the oceanic space be considered in separate contexts.

In this connexion, the highest priority should be given to the considerable efforts that will be needed in the field of scientific research, as a basis for future uses. A practical means to foster such efforts might consist in the establishment of an ad hoc body for each internal sea, under the auspices of existing international organizations operating in the above-mentioned field. Such bodies, which would draw on the scientific contributions and the financial support of all the coastal States of the area concerned, would obviously be open to co-operation with other countries, in the best interests of mankind and science.

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