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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

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE  
AT ITS NINETEENTH MEETING ON 26 AUGUST 1968  
SUMMARIZING THE DISCUSSION ON THE SCIENTIFIC  
ASPECTS OF THE ITEM

At its first session, the Ad Hoc Committee decided that the scientific aspects of the question would be considered by the Committee itself. On 25 March 1968 an outline of relevant scientific aspects, prepared by the secretariat of the IOC of UNESCO (A/AC.135/4), was circulated to the members of the Committee. At the ninth meeting on 27 March, the Chairman stated that the Ad Hoc Committee would like to have from the IOC a paper on the scientific aspects of the item.

This paper, entitled "Scientific Aspects of Peaceful Uses of the Ocean Floor", was submitted on 18 June 1968 (A/AC.135/17). A preambular note explained that in view of the limited time available before the second session of the Ad Hoc Committee, the IOC Chairman had decided to ask the secretariat to compile a brief document summarizing available information on scientific knowledge of the sea-bed and on methods for its investigation. Although the IOC Bureau and Consultative Council had not had an adequate opportunity to examine the paper in detail, it had agreed that the study, while preliminary in character, contained much useful information and should be transmitted to the Ad Hoc Committee, for use along with the ECOSOC report (E/4449/Add.1), the General Scientific Framework for World Ocean Study, and other sources of information.

The paper prepared by the IOC secretariat was divided into sections concerning basic facts about the ocean and its floor, problems related to the processes of formation and to the geographical distribution of marine minerals, some methodological problems related to scientific explorations of the ocean and its resources, problems related to human activities at sea, and in particular to the feasibility and safety of exploration activities at sea, and problems related to the accessibility of scientific data. The paper also contained selected bibliographic and other information.

The Ad Hoc Committee has discussed the scientific aspects of the question in the course of two meetings at its third session (A/AC.135/SR.15 and 18). At the first of those meetings, the above-mentioned paper was presented by the Chairman of the IOC, who stressed the fact that it did not contain an exhaustive list of present-day peaceful uses of the ocean floor and that the account of the scientific aspects of those uses was also not exhaustive. The IOC was confident that the Ad Hoc Committee would agree that there was need for a very considerable expansion of sea-bed and ocean floor research since existing knowledge is far from adequate. He emphasized the Commission's continuing interest in the scientific aspects and its willingness to assist and serve as a focal point for accelerating world-wide efforts to conduct the necessary investigations. On behalf of the IOC, he suggested that the Ad Hoc Committee should support the Secretary-General's proposal to broaden the base of IOC so as to enable it to formulate and co-ordinate the expanded programme of oceanic research; that it should propose the establishment of machinery necessary to secure close collaboration between the secretariats of IOC and the United Nations and relevant subsidiary bodies; that it might propose that the IOC would be considered to be a marine scientific and science-organizational

advisory body for any United Nations' commission, committee, etc., engaged in legal, political or economic matters related to the marine environment; and that it propose that the United Nations join with other concerned organizations of the United Nations family in supporting the Commission's activities financially.

There was unanimous appreciation of the work done by IOC.

The first speaker this morning was the distinguished representative of the United States who dealt comprehensively with the United States Government's proposal that the 1970's be declared an international decade of ocean exploration.

Elaborating the concepts of the decade's activities he classified them in three groups:

- (a) Kinds of work involved;
- (b) Question of organization and finance;
- (c) Prospective benefits.

He appreciated that in the course of discussion these concepts would be further modified and that the design of an international decade of ocean exploration would develop as the nations involved themselves began to develop their own specific plans.

He recognized that the programme included items outside the terms of reference of the Ad Hoc Committee as the decade was directed not only to the non-living resources of the deep ocean floor but to the whole compass of ocean resources in their entirety.

He stressed that the decade

(a) was not the only vehicle for attaining the desired objectives in relation to ocean resources;

(b) it was only one element in a long range and long-term programme to be undertaken under the aegis of the United Nations;

(c) it was not intended to be an alternative to other efforts in this long-term programme or to the expanded programme suggested by the Secretary-General and would not interfere with it. In fact, he thought that other kinds of activity must be undertaken if our objectives in regard to the exploration of the sea-bed resources were to be obtained.

He conceived of the decade as one means - and an important means - of stimulating the investigation of sea-bed resources and of fostering co-operation in their exploration and development as well as of providing the means of supplying all nations with the knowledge that was a prerequisite to the exploration and use of these resources.

In regard to the kind of activities to be undertaken as part of the decade, he mentioned that participating nations would be expected to formulate plans, the essence of which would be exploration in the broadest sense - not merely the type of exploration and investigation of specific mineral deposits undertaken by those with a special interest in their exploration - which would not form a substantial part of the decade's programme - but exploration designed to reveal the character of some of the sea floor resources of which little is known yet, the environments in which these resources occur, their formation, their characteristics and their potential. Mapping - geological, geophysical and bathymetric mapping - of the sea-bed to establish its topography, its geological composition and structure - would be an important part of the studies involved and would be essential for an appraisal of the potential of the resources available and for the determination of targets for more detailed exploration which could lead to eventual exploitation. The decade could not possibly complete the work but would constitute a beginning.

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As regards organization and finance participating nations would be expected to formulate specific plans and to arrange the necessary finance. The IOC would play a vital role in stimulating investigations in certain areas. While relying on individual nations for specific plans and supervising their work and publishing the results, it would perform a vital co-ordinating function between related projects and arrange exchanges of information and data.

According to the United States delegate, although the IOC's burden of work would be increased this need not result in a change in the fundamental character of the IOC or broaden the nature of its activities. The responsibilities devolving on the IOC as a result of the decade would not necessitate a widening of its scope but would require a strengthening of its staff.

The decade would help nations, which were unable independently to organize ocean exploration projects, by providing for the participation of their nationals in the studies undertaken within the decade and by affording training and experience which would allow their nationals to carry out their own projects later on and also giving developing nations the opportunity to arrange for selected area of their continental shelves to be mapped. The developed nations would help developing nations with equipment and funds for these projects and technical assistance funds might also be expected to be available through the usual channels.

As an example of what studies might reveal the United States delegate referred to the expedition of the vessel Glomar Challenger engaged in shallow core drilling to ascertain the structure and composition of the depths of the ocean floor. The National Science Foundation has announced that the Expedition had succeeded in drilling a hole at a depth of 11,750 feet of water in the Gulf of Mexico and had found that oil and gas deposits existed at that depth.

The benefits expected from the decade were:

- (a) expansion of knowledge of ocean resources which would lead to and assist in their development and utilization;
- (b) perfection of improved instruments and methods useful in mineral exploitation and in other activities such as navigation - with resultant benefits to peoples of all nations;
- (c) the general advantage deriving from the realization of the value of international co-operation towards a common goal - a realization that would greatly advance the United Nations primary objective of general international co-operation;
- (d) the opportunity afforded to developing nations of acquiring technical capability in marine science and technology and in acquiring information that would assist them in the development of resources within their own national jurisdictions;
- (e) and the most important of all, the contribution that the use of the resources of this area would make to industry and industrialized agriculture - for which the developing nations could prepare and equip themselves by taking advantage of the means made available to them through the medium of the international decade of ocean exploration.

The United States delegate hoped that the draft resolution embodying these ideas which they proposed submitting to the General Assembly would receive general support and approval from this Committee.

There was complete agreement that the activities of all bodies and individuals engaged in scientific research into the marine environment and its resources, activities on the international, national, regional scale, the activities of institutes whether private or governmental, whether within or outside the United Nations family, should be co-ordinated in order to avoid overlapping and ensure the highest degree of efficiency and economy. Co-ordination should be at the national and international levels and both bilateral and multilateral.

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There was a need for balanced research and survey activities to solve specific scientific problems; there should be appropriate programmes for systematic collection of data on a regional and global basis.

The basic principle to be observed was the freedom of scientific research and exploration on the analogy of the Antarctica and Outer Space Treaties - with the results of research to be universally shared.

It was suggested that the Ad Hoc Committee recommend to the General Assembly the importance of this approach of full international co-operation in accordance with the principles of scientific research and that specifically the Committee should recommend: improved arrangements for dissemination of all information derived from research and the results of scientific discovery: the provision of facilities for training and research such as fellowships, seminars, grants for establishment of research institutes and programmes in developing countries; regular issue of scientific research bulletins and special arrangements for educating the international public in the significance of such research and its results so as to stimulate public interest in and public support for such work.

It was also suggested that scientific research should be concentrated in some major fields and priorities should be established.

Fields suggested were:

- (a) study of the topography of the ocean floor and preparation of more accurate bathymetric maps such as the up-to-date geological and geophysical map of the Indian Ocean prepared by the IOC/UNESCO;
- (b) improvement of the International Data Exchange system and standardization of procedures in regard to data registration;
- (c) promotion of international co-operation in the prevention of pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation activities, with special attention to radioactive pollution and oil pollution.

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Many of these tasks are within the objectives of the decade and would be performed during it. Some examples of these tasks, which correspond to the proposals made, were:

- determination of the geological structure of the continental shelf and its mineral resources and energy potential;
- preparation of topographical geological and geophysical maps of selected regions of the deep ocean floor;
- selective coring and drilling of the continental margins and depths of the deep sea;
- preparation of maps of selected regions of the continental shelf of developing countries.

The main task of the Ad Hoc Committee has to do with the field of information and the means of providing the General Assembly with sufficient data to enable it to pursue action.

The IOC report, according to many speakers, contained sufficient data and should be commended as a whole to the General Assembly.

The Secretary-General's proposal that the IOC be instructed to formulate an expanded programme of international co-operation was widely endorsed.

Some speakers had reservations regarding the financial implications of such an expanded programme, largely because they had not had time to consult their Governments, and also regarding the implication that the IOC's base may have to be broadened. Commenting on this latter reservation, the Chairman of IOC observed that it would be premature to say that broadening of the IOC's base should not envisage new fields of competence for it. There could be different forms of such broadening:

- (a) structurally it could be broadened;
- (b) the programmes of IOC could be broadened without broadening of its field of competence; and, lastly,
- (c) its field of competence could be broadened, but that would depend on the concept of the expanded programme as it finally evolved.

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Exploration of mineral resources and pre-exploitation work would not be within the IOC's competence, though pure scientific research would have industrial side effects. The IOC would be a purely scientific body and the formulation of the expanded programme would primarily be conceived by scientists.

The view was expressed by several speakers that the United Nations Organization should assume an important role in co-ordinating activities in the field of scientific research and that there should be adequate supervision by the United Nations membership over programming and planning.

Some speakers, while welcoming the idea of an international decade of ocean exploration as an important initiative in promoting the concept of a co-ordinated long-term programme of oceanographic research, observed that it should be carefully considered by the General Assembly. As IOC's work is to cover the whole ocean and the concept of the decade is also designed to ensure the more effective exploration of the ocean as a whole, while the Ad Hoc Committee's task is strictly limited to problems related to the ocean floor beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, the whole question should be considered by the General Assembly under an item of broader scope related to the world ocean in general.

The Soviet delegate fully agreed with IOC's conclusion that the proposal for an international decade of ocean exploration was a useful initiative which could stimulate preparation of an expanded programme of study of the ocean bed as recommended by the Secretary-General.

The Soviet delegate maintained that a programme of ocean research could only be undertaken on the basis of wide international co-operation which must first be established. The main features of this expanded programme should be the following:

(a) it should cover the methodology of technical processes and study new technical means of investigation of the sea-bed resources;

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(b) it should be directed towards economic exploration and should undertake the study of not only mineral deposits and their geographic distribution but also the mechanism in the formation of such deposits and their chemical composition;

(c) it should include the study of environmental conditions which would make it possible to exploit these resources;

(d) stratification of deep lying mineral deposits.

The programme should be on a planetary scale. The Soviet delegate noted that all these points were brought out in the IOC's paper which should be submitted to the General Assembly as a working document.

The Soviet delegation supported the proposal that the IOC, in preparing a scientific programme for expanded international co-operation should work on the proposal made by the Secretary-General and also take into consideration the United States proposal for an international decade. He stressed, and the United States delegation agreed, that from a scientific standpoint it would be more correct to speak of a long-term programme extending beyond a decade. The United States representative pointed out that the period would vary for different aspects, and some would take less than a decade. He emphasized that the idea of a decade was a mechanism to help develop support for the programme.

Replying to the point raised whether in view of the ECOSOC resolution this Committee should take a different stand, the United States delegation observed that that was not its intention but rather that whatever this Committee did should be within the scope of the ECOSOC resolution although what ECOSOC had done was based on much less consideration than this Committee had given to the question. He envisaged a dovetailing of approaches rather than a conflict.

The representative of UNESCO stated that in recognition of the need for inter-agency co-operation, specialized agencies had already taken action to this end - as an example of which he cited the recent agreement between UNESCO and FAO on the subject of marine science

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and fisheries, and the Exchange of Letters between UNESCO and WMO which was likely to result in a similar agreement, and also the establishment by IMCO, UNESCO and FAO of a world group of experts to handle scientific aspects of marine pollution.

In conclusion, the concepts of an international decade and of an expanded programme under IOC co-ordination were widely welcomed but their precise interrelation would require future examination, it being understood that the decade was an important element in the whole process of scientific research into the question.

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