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COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF THE SEA-BED
AND THE OCEAN FLOOR BEYOND THE LIMITS OF
NATIONAL JURISDICTION

Statement by the representative of UNESCO, Mr. Alfonso de Silva,
to the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of the Sea-Bed and the
Ocean Floor beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction
at its 40th meeting on 26 August 1970

Mr. Chairman, UNESCO has been following the deliberations of the General Assembly of its Ad-Hoc Committee, and latterly, of its Committee on the Peaceful Uses of the Sea-Bed and the Ocean Floor beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction.

On several occasions it has taken part either directly or through its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission in the preparation of studies or the implementation of decisions or programmes adopted by those bodies, such as the long-term and expanded programme of oceanic exploration and research (LEPOR), of which the International Decade of Ocean Exploration is a key element.

We have accordingly noted with keen interest, not only the Secretary-General's study on international machinery (A/AC.138/23) but also the important proposals on an international régime made in March by a group of Afro-Asian countries (A/AC.138/SC.2/L.6, annex III), and those submitted to the present session by France (A/AC.138/27), the United Kingdom (A/AC.138/26), the United States (A/AC.138/25) and the USSR (A/AC.138/29, annex II).

We have also listened very carefully to the suggestions put forward by a large number of delegations, since virtually all of them, when referring in some form or other to the international régime to be set up for the exploration and exploitation of the area beyond the limits of national jurisdiction have dealt with the aspects of scientific research and personnel training.

Consequently, the fact that we took no part in the discussions of the Economic and Technical Sub-Committee, whose report has just been adopted, was not due to lack of interest in the subject, but to our awareness that the Sub-Committee was pressed for time, since the main purpose of the session was to prepare an agreed declaration of principles and to pursue, though not to conclude, the discussions on international machinery.

But, Mr. Chairman, irrespective of the form this declaration of principles may take, and whatever the functions and powers assigned to the international machinery, one cannot fail to express satisfaction at the significant progress made towards a global and peaceful understanding on an international régime.

I need hardly remind you that UNESCO has a statutory mandate to promote international peace and understanding through co-operation among peoples in the fields of education, science and culture.

The inventive capacity and knowledge of all mankind must obviously be drawn upon for the exploration and exploitation of the sea-bed and the ocean floor and the preservation of the marine environment.

To paraphrase Sir Francis Bacon, who said that "Knowledge is power", the international community, and the developing countries in particular, clearly need men and women equipped with the scientific and technical knowledge which will enable them to investigate, control and exploit these potential areas of wealth until recently unknown.

In the economic sphere, as Mr. Philip de Seynes, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, so cogently pointed out, we must be forewarned against market fluctuations which might cancel out the benefits mankind could reap from the exploitation of those areas.

In the scientific and technological fields, too, our task is once again to anticipate and prevent fluctuations in the market of knowledge and know-how.

Although there may be legal and practical reasons for establishing different régimes for the sea-bed and for the superjacent waters, it is undeniable that, in this day and age, scientific research and exploration (as distinct from commercial prospecting) are indivisible, both from the intellectual and logistic standpoints.

Without therefore prejudging the eventual nature and mode of operation of the international machinery to be established, it is readily apparent that in order to carry out such an immense task existing institutions and arrangements will have to be turned to account, international scientific advice obtained on a large scale and new research work encouraged.

UNESCO, with its general mandate in the science sector and with more than ten years of experience and activities in marine science, recognizes the complementary and specific competence of other organizations in the United Nations system. This is why, as the members of this Committee are aware, the Director-General took the initiative of setting up in 1969, together with his colleagues from other agencies, the Inter-Secretariat Committee on Scientific Programmes relating to Oceanography, better known as ICSPRO from its English initials.

Through ICSPRO, UNESCO, FAO, WMO, IMCO and the United Nations itself, there can be joint planning of the scientific aid and support action required by the international machinery that would have to be set up.

For example, ICSPRO could be responsible for planning an expanded - and by definition joint - programme of instruction and vocational training in the various disciplines and techniques relating to research, exploration and exploitation of the sea-bed and the ocean floor.

For his part, the Director-General of UNESCO would be prepared to request the UNESCO General Conference (opening on 12 October) to take special measures to promote an expanded joint educational and training programme in oceanography. This programme could, and in fact should, be launched without waiting for international machinery to be set up, since the shortage of trained personnel is an objective disadvantage. The developing countries would thus be able to secure the highly-skilled personnel without which they could scarcely participate fully - within the framework of the régime to be established - in research programmes.

In addition to the increasing support to be given by ICSPRO to the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, all States might well take a much more active part in the planning and implementation of joint international scientific research programmes on the sea-bed and the ocean floor, with the co-operation of scientists and specialists from different countries, especially the developing countries.

In this connexion, mention should be made of the draft Statutes revised by IOC at its sixth session, which are to be submitted to the next session of the UNESCO General Conference. These Statutes will not only strengthen existing links with the other organizations participating in ICSPRO - in addition to UNESCO, within whose legal framework it remains - but will also encourage wider participation by member States (at present numbering seventy), especially the developing countries (four vice-chairmen instead of two, abolition of the Bureau). The new Executive Council - 1 chairman, 4 vice-chairmen and 14 members - will replace the Consultative Council

and the Bureau, which was empowered to take decisions diverging from the Consultative Council's recommendations. Member States can also intensify the research work of IOC and speed up the publication of its results by means of the new trust fund administered by UNESCO on behalf of IOC, to which one country (Argentina) has already made an initial contribution.

Mr. Chairman, in view not only of the complexity of the subject, but also of the wealth, variety and importance of the suggestions made by many delegations and by the Secretary-General himself, a thorough analytical study is required before a general stand can be taken.

For that reason, the Director-General of UNESCO reserves the right to communicate formally to the Secretary-General his detailed comments on the topics of interest to UNESCO, for consideration by the Committee. He thought it timely, however, to make a few preliminary comments at this stage on what could be done immediately in the matter of scientific research and the training of specialists and technicians, since he is fully aware of the urgent need to act and to join forces so that all the developing countries may participate effectively in the peaceful exploration and exploitation of the sea-bed and the ocean floor.

We are therefore anxious to help and respond to the aspirations of member States, as they will be expressed in the agreements to be reached. We are here to help.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
