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Annual report of the Secretary-General under article 166, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

Report of the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority under article 166, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

I. Introduction

1. The present report is an addendum to and should be read in conjunction with [ISBA/26/A/2](#). The information in the present report is updated as at 31 October 2021.

II. Membership of the Authority

2. There have been no new ratifications or accessions to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea since July 2020.

3. On 25 June 2021, Bosnia and Herzegovina became a party to the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982. That means that there are still 17 members of the International Seabed Authority that had become parties to the Convention before the adoption of the Agreement and that had yet to become parties thereto.

4. A total of 29 States, in addition to the European Union, maintain permanent missions to the Authority, namely, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, France, Gabon, Germany, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Nauru, Nigeria, Panama, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Spain and Trinidad and Tobago. Since September 2020, credentials have been presented by the Permanent Representatives of Bangladesh, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Gabon, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Malta, Namibia, Nigeria, Panama, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Spain and the European Union.

* New dates of the in-person meetings originally scheduled for July 2020 and then July 2021.



III. Budget and status of contributions

A. Budget

5. In December 2020, the Assembly adopted the budget of the Authority for the financial period 2021–2022 in the amount of \$19,411,280.¹

B. Status of contributions

6. As at 31 October 2021, 88 per cent of contributions to the budget for 2021 had been received. Contributions outstanding from member States for prior periods (1998–2020) amounted to \$590,332.

7. The following 54 member States were in arrears in the payment of their contributions to the Authority in an amount equal to or exceeding the amount of the contributions due for the preceding two full years: Angola, Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Benin, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Jordan, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mongolia, Montenegro, Namibia, Nepal, Niger, North Macedonia, Oman, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Suriname, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

8. The balance of the working capital fund stood at \$676,090 against an approved level of \$750,000.

9. Each contractor is required to pay an annual overhead charge for the supervision and administration of contracts for exploration. The charge is payable at the time of submission of the annual report (31 March each year). In 2021, 30 annual reports were due for submission, representing a total revenue in terms of overhead charges of \$1,800,000. All contractors have paid the overhead charge for 2021.

C. Status of the voluntary trust funds

10. The capital of the Endowment Fund for Marine Scientific Research in the Area stood at \$3,563,567, including recent contributions from Mexico (\$10,000) and China (\$20,000). The available fund stands at \$411,962.

11. Regarding the voluntary trust fund to defray the costs of participation of members from developing countries in the meetings of the Legal and Technical Commission and of the Finance Committee, the balance stands at \$118,486, including recent contributions from China (\$40,000), France (\$20,000), the Philippines (\$7,500) and DeepGreen Metals Inc. (\$15,000) and voluntary contributions of \$6,000 each from five contractors in 2021.²

¹ See [ISBA/26/A/5/Add.1/Rev.2-ISBA/26/C/18/Add.1/Rev.2](#) and [ISBA/26/A/19](#).

² During the twenty-fourth session, the Assembly decided, as an interim solution and on a voluntary basis, to add an additional contribution of \$6,000 to the annual overhead charge invoice to the contractors on an opt-out basis. Contributions would be allocated as a contribution to the voluntary trust fund for the purpose of defraying the cost of participation of members of the Legal and Technical Commission and of the Finance Committee from developing countries in the meetings of the Commission and of the Committee. See [ISBA/24/A/11](#).

12. With regard to the voluntary trust fund to support the participation of members of the Council of the Authority from developing States in the meetings of the Council, the fund had received no new contributions during the reporting period. The total available fund remains at \$20,579.

13. With regard to the voluntary trust fund for the purpose of providing the requisite funds related to the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Enterprise, recent contributions have been received from the Philippines in the amount of \$7,500 and from DeepGreen Metals Inc. in the amount of \$4,500. The available fund stands at \$9,468.

14. With regard to the trust fund for extrabudgetary support for the Authority, contributions with respect to specific projects have been received from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (\$287,430), France (\$16,045), DeepGreen Metals Inc. (\$40,000), Global Sea Mineral Resources NV (GSR) (\$40,000), UK Seabed Resources Ltd. (\$40,000), Monaco (\$23,512) and the National Marine Biodiversity Institute of the Republic of Korea (\$30,415). The balance of the fund currently stands at \$916,650.

IV. Secretariat

15. In response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, the Secretary-General issued in March 2020 and subsequently regularly updated administrative guidelines in line with those issued by United Nations Headquarters with a view to reducing exposure to COVID-19 while at the same time continuing to maintain programmatic and operational activities. The guidelines were not renewed and, consequently, are no longer applicable as from July 2021. The Secretary-General also amended the administrative instruction on working hours, overtime, leave and attendance to allow flexible working arrangements for staff members, including remote work.³

16. As a result of the disruptions to and restrictions on international travel, several internationally recruited staff members have been unable to avail themselves of annual leave and home leave entitlements since March 2020, and some have not been able to reunite with their families. While the situation is gradually improving, high levels of stress and burnout need to be recognized, as well as their adverse impact on the operations of the secretariat. As at 31 October 2021, annual leave balances and home leave entitlements remained significantly higher than budgeted, and the situation was likely to continue into 2022, creating unforeseen financial liabilities for the Authority.

17. With a view to enhancing the security of information and data at the secretariat, the Secretary-General revised the bulletin on information sensitivity, classification and handling and the administrative instruction on issuance, retention and disposal of communications and information technology assets.⁴ Given the increased use of consultants and individual contractors, and that of experts for advisory meetings, the relevant administrative instructions were also revised.⁵

18. The training of staff members of the secretariat has been substantively improved. Other than the mandatory training for staff members available through the United Nations Inspira platform, an Education Assistance Programme was developed for General Service staff members and National Professional Officers.⁶ Online

³ See [ISBA/ST/AI/2020/4/Rev.1](#).

⁴ See [ISBA/ST/SGB/2021/2](#) and [ISBA/ST/AI/2021/5](#).

⁵ See [ISBA/ST/AI/2021/1](#) and [ISBA/ST/AI/2021/2](#).

⁶ See [ISBA/ST/AI/2021/4](#).

learning programmes were also made available to all staff members, including on cyber-risk management and effective writing skills.

19. The number of established posts in the secretariat as at 31 October 2021 was 45 (27 Professional, 2 National Professional Officer and 16 General Service), with 5 additional positions supported by extrabudgetary funds and programmes. Since May 2021, the secretariat has processed 13 job openings. A total of 8 out of the 13 vacancies were filled internally. Six staff members were separated from service as a result of resignation, retirement or a return to the releasing organization under secondment. A total of 27 short-term consultants from 11 countries were hired in 2021.

V. Meetings of the organs of the Authority

A. Legal and Technical Commission

20. The first part of the twenty-sixth session of the Legal and Technical Commission was held from 24 February to 6 March 2020. At the meetings, the Commission decided to recommend to the Council a draft annex VI to the draft regulations on exploitation.⁷ The Commission considered and endorsed the process for reviewing the environmental impact statement in relation to the testing of mining components or other activities requiring an environmental impact assessment during exploration, as well as a template for reporting an environmental impact assessment undertaken during exploration.⁸ With a view to assisting contractors in reporting on each five-year programme of activities under the exploration contract, the Commission developed a standardized template for the content of periodic reports.

21. The second part of the twenty-sixth session of the Commission was held virtually from 6 to 31 July 2020. The Commission considered 29 annual reports on the activities carried out by contractors in 2019. It also considered an application for approval of a plan of work for exploration for polymetallic nodules in the Area from Blue Minerals Jamaica Ltd. and made recommendations to the Council.⁹ The Commission took note of a report on the study of the potential impact of polymetallic nodule production from the Area on the economies of developing land-based producers of those metals that were likely to be the most seriously affected, and it made recommendations to the Council.¹⁰

22. In 2021, the Commission resumed virtual meetings for a total of six weeks (five weeks between 22 March and 1 July and one week from 27 to 30 September 2021). It considered seven applications for extension, for a five-year period, of approved plans of work for exploration, and it made recommendations to the Council (see para. 31). The Commission also reviewed 30 annual reports on the activities carried out by contractors in 2020.¹¹ The work of the Commission in relation to the preparation of draft standards and guidelines, the review and development of regional environmental management plans and the implementation of a data management strategy is reflected in section VIII of the present report.

⁷ See [ISBA/26/C/17](#).

⁸ See [ISBA/25/LTC/6/Rev.1](#) and [ISBA/25/LTC/6/Rev.1/Corr.1](#).

⁹ See [ISBA/26/C/22](#). The Council approved the plan of work for exploration for polymetallic nodules submitted by Blue Minerals Jamaica Ltd. in December 2020. See [ISBA/26/C/27/Rev.1](#).

¹⁰ See [ISBA/26/C/12/Add.1](#).

¹¹ For further details on the work of the Commission in 2020 and 2021, see [ISBA/26/C/12](#), [ISBA/26/C/12/Add.1](#) and [ISBA/26/C/12/Add.2](#).

B. Finance Committee

23. In 2020, the Finance Committee held two formal meetings and six informal meetings, all in virtual format. The Committee took note of the implementation of the budget for 2019, the status of the working capital fund, the status of contributions and related matters, the audit report on the accounts of the Authority for 2019 and the status of the trust funds of the Authority. The Committee approved the establishment of the Cost Recovery Fund of the Authority. It decided to recommend the approval of the proposed budget of the Authority for the financial period 2021–2022 and also decided to recommend an increase in the annual overhead charge for the administration and supervision of contracts for exploration.¹²

24. In 2021, the Committee held four virtual meetings, on 30 and 31 March, 18 May and 30 June 2021. It took note of the implementation of the budget for the financial period 2019–2020, the audit report on the accounts of the Authority for 2019 and 2020, the updated report on the status of contributions to the budget for the financial period 2021–2022 and the updated report on the status of the trust funds of the Authority. The Committee also discussed a report on costs associated with the use of the Jamaica Conference Centre, a report on the costs of participation by the Authority in the United Nations common system of organizations and a report on future financing of the Authority.¹³ The work of the Committee on the issue of benefit-sharing is reflected in section VIII of the present report.

C. Council

25. The Council was not able to convene in-person meetings as scheduled for the second part of the twenty-sixth session. However, in 2020 and 2021, under silence procedure, it elected Real Admiral (retired) Khurshed Alam (Bangladesh) as President of the Council for the twenty-sixth session, and it adopted a revised agenda.¹⁴ The Council also adopted a decision concerning the candidate for the election of the Secretary-General,¹⁵ approved an application for a plan of work for exploration for polymetallic nodules submitted by Blue Minerals Jamaica Ltd.¹⁶ and adopted a decision relating to the budget of the Authority for the financial period 2021–2022, as well as a decision relating to the annual overhead charge referred to in section 10.5 of the standard clauses for exploration contracts.¹⁷ In addition, the Council adopted a decision to extend the term of office of the current members of the Legal and Technical Commission by one year to 31 December 2022.¹⁸

D. Assembly

26. It is recalled that the President of the Assembly for the twenty-fifth session, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica, Kamina Johnson Smith, declared in writing the opening of the twenty-sixth session of the Assembly on 5 October 2020. The Assembly then adopted its agenda for the twenty-sixth session under silence procedure.¹⁹ The Permanent Representative of France to the Authority, Denys Wibaux, was elected as President of the Assembly, with the Dominican

¹² See [ISBA/26/A/10-ISBA/26/C/21](#).

¹³ See [ISBA/26/A/10/Add.1-ISBA/26/C/21/Add.1](#).

¹⁴ See [ISBA/26/C/1/Rev.1](#).

¹⁵ See [ISBA/26/C/25](#).

¹⁶ See [ISBA/26/C/27/Rev.1](#).

¹⁷ See [ISBA/26/C/26](#) and [ISBA/26/C/28](#).

¹⁸ See [ISBA/26/C/30](#).

¹⁹ See [ISBA/26/A/1](#).

Republic, Nauru, Nigeria and Poland elected as Vice-Presidents. The following members have been appointed as members of the Credentials Committee for the twenty-sixth session of the Assembly: Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Czechia, Lesotho, Myanmar, South Africa, Spain and Sri Lanka.

27. It is also recalled that, under silence procedure, the Assembly re-elected Michael William Lodge (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) as Secretary-General of the Authority for a four-year term from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2024.²⁰ The Assembly also adopted a decision relating to the election to fill the vacancies on the Council of the Authority in accordance with article 161, paragraph 3, of the Convention.²¹ The Assembly adopted a decision relating to the action plan of the Authority in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development²² and a decision relating to the implementation of a programmatic approach to capacity development.²³ In addition, the Assembly adopted a decision to name the museum of the Authority in honour of Nii Allotey Odunton²⁴ and a decision concerning the extension of the terms of office of the current members of the Finance Committee by one year, such that they will expire on 31 December 2022.²⁵

VI. Meetings of States parties to the Convention

28. During the thirtieth Meeting of States parties to the Convention, in 2020, the Secretary-General provided information on the activities carried out by the Authority since the twenty-ninth Meeting, including during the pandemic, in a written statement.

29. On 21 June 2021, the Secretary-General provided information on the activities of the Authority to the thirty-first Meeting of States parties to the Convention. He emphasized that the Authority had managed to carry on with essential activities despite operational constraints and a lack of in-person meetings since February 2020.

VII. Status of exploration contracts and related matters

A. Status of contracts for exploration

30. Thus far, 31 contracts for exploration have entered into force (19 for polymetallic nodules, 7 for polymetallic sulphides and 5 for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts). They include a contract for exploration for polymetallic nodules signed with Blue Minerals Jamaica Ltd. on 4 April 2021.

B. Applications for extension of exploration contracts

31. Seven applications for extension, for a five-year period, of approved plans of work for exploration were received by the Secretary-General and considered by the Commission at its meetings in April 2021. They were submitted by the following entities: the Interoceanmetal Joint Organization, JSC Yuzhmorgeologiya, the Government of the Republic of Korea, the Deep Ocean Resources Development Co.

²⁰ See [ISBA/26/A/16](#).

²¹ See [ISBA/26/A/20](#).

²² See [ISBA/26/A/17](#).

²³ See [ISBA/26/A/18](#).

²⁴ See [ISBA/26/A/15](#).

²⁵ See [ISBA/26/A/23](#).

Ltd., the China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association, the Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (IFREMER) and the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources of Germany. The Commission, in April 2021, made recommendations in respect of each application to the Council.²⁶

C. Informal meeting of the contractors

32. In continuation of a practice begun in 2017, the fourth annual informal meeting of exploration contractors was held virtually from 19 to 22 April 2021. Participants exchanged views on, among other issues, the status of development of regulations on exploitation in the Area and associated standards and guidelines, implementation of the contractor training programme, implementation of the data management strategy of the Authority and the review and ongoing development of regional environmental management plans. Also discussed at the meeting was the contribution of contractors to the improved mapping of the ocean floor within the context of the Seabed 2030 project (see para. 49).

VIII. Report on the implementation of the strategic plan of the Authority for the period 2019–2023

33. It is recalled that section A of annex I to [ISBA/26/A/2](#) provides an assessment against performance indicators of the performance of the Authority in implementing the strategic directions set out in the strategic plan of the Authority for the period 2019–2023. That assessment was up-to-date until July 2020. As a result of the amount of time that has elapsed since the preparation of [ISBA/26/A/2](#), the present section includes a narrative update on the main activities that were carried out between July 2020 and October 2021 to implement the strategic directions of the Authority. An updated assessment against performance indicators will be provided in the context of the annual report of the Secretary-General in 2022.

A. Strategic direction 1: realize the role of the Authority in a global context

34. In the strategic plan of the Authority for the period 2019–2023, the importance for the Authority of aligning its programmes and initiatives with the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 14, is explicitly recognized. In that context, in 2021 the Secretary-General commissioned an independent report on the contribution of the Authority to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and he established a group of international experts with the responsibility of providing strategic guidance and inputs on the preparation of the report. The report was based on an analysis of documentary evidence, along with interviews with experts from a broad range of backgrounds and representing the full spectrum of relevant stakeholders of the Authority. The report includes the conclusion that the Authority currently contributes to 12 of the Goals.²⁷ A high-level event will be convened for the launch of the report, on 30 November 2021.²⁸

²⁶ See [ISBA/26/C/31](#), [ISBA/26/C/32](#), [ISBA/26/C/33](#), [ISBA/26/C/34](#), [ISBA/26/C/35](#), [ISBA/26/C/36](#) and [ISBA/26/C/37](#).

²⁷ Report available at https://isa.org.jm/files/files/documents/ISA_Contribution_to_the_SDGs_2021.pdf.

²⁸ For more information, see <https://www.isa.org.jm/event/report-launch-contribution-ISA-2030-agenda>.

35. On 8 July 2021, the Secretary-General was invited to attend the high-level political forum on sustainable development as ministerial respondent in the session entitled “Restoring the conditions for Sustainable Development Goal progress in African countries, least developed countries and landlocked developing countries”. The Secretary-General highlighted the opportunities offered by the Convention to all developing States, including the most vulnerable of them, as well as the importance of the Convention for the realization of socioeconomic development objectives.
36. On 13 July 2021, the Authority hosted a virtual event on ensuring the sustainable management and stewardship of the deep seabed and its resources for the benefit of all humanity on the margins of the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The event was co-sponsored by the Cook Islands, Ghana, Jamaica, Malta, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, South Africa and IFREMER (France). Over 140 participants from 64 countries participated in the event.²⁹
37. As part of a series of events to be organized in 2022 in celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the opening for signature of the Convention at Montego Bay, Jamaica, the secretariat has issued a call for expressions of interest in participating in a conference entitled “Women in the Law of the Sea”, to be organized by the secretariat in March to June 2022 (dates to be confirmed). The conference will be aimed at highlighting the important contributions made by women to the development and implementation of the law of the sea, the participation of women in the institutions created by the Convention and related regional and subregional organizations and the pathways to enhancing the potential for women to contribute to the law of the sea in the future. Speakers from developing States, and from the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States in particular, are encouraged to participate.³⁰
38. Under strategic direction 1, the Authority is encouraged to establish and strengthen strategic alliances and partnerships with relevant subregional, regional and global organizations. In that connection, the secretariat has continued to work collaboratively within the framework of UN-Oceans and has participated in several technical meetings organized in July 2020, April 2021 and October 2021, as well as in the high-level meeting held on 10 December 2020, chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, the United Nations Legal Counsel.
39. The secretariat participated in the fifty-third Executive Council of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (3–9 February 2021), as well as the thirty-first Assembly of the Commission (12–24 June 2021), where it highlighted the very fruitful and productive cooperation established between the two organizations and the need for increased synergies. On 21 May 2021, the Authority officially joined the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange network of the Commission as an associate data unit, enabling the secretariat to serve as a node for the Exchange’s Ocean Biodiversity Information System.
40. The secretariat contributed to the second and third consultative meetings on the development of an African strategy for ocean governance, organized by the United Nations Environment Programme, in collaboration with the African Union Commission and the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, on 21 and 22 October 2020 and on 15 and 16 June 2021.

²⁹ For more information, see <https://www.isa.org.jm/event/side-event-hlpf2021-ensuring-sustainable-management-and-stewardship-deep-seabed>.

³⁰ For more information, see <https://www.isa.org.jm/news/isa-conference-2022-women-law-sea-call-expression-interest>.

41. The Secretary-General participated in the Annual Ministerial Meetings, in September 2020 and September 2021, of Foreign Ministers of Landlocked Developing Countries. The meetings provided an opportunity for the Secretary-General to remind those countries of the specific provisions contained in the Convention that allow that group of countries to engage in the legal regime for the Area.

B. Strategic direction 2: strengthen the regulatory framework for activities in the Area

42. Owing to the impossibility of holding in-person meetings of the Council since March 2020, the Council has not been able to advance its consideration of the draft exploitation regulations. A detailed report on the status of the draft regulations on exploitation of mineral resources in the Area and the proposed road map for 2022 and 2023, for the consideration by the Council, is provided in document [ISBA/26/C/44](#).

43. At its meetings in 2020 and 2021, the Legal and Technical Commission undertook work on phase-one standards and guidelines as a priority matter. In July 2020, the Commission issued three draft standards and guidelines for stakeholder consultations. In March 2021, it issued seven draft standards and guidelines for stakeholder consultations and, in September 2021, after considering the comments received from stakeholders, decided to submit all phase-one draft standards and guidelines to the Council for its consideration, as part of the package of the draft regulations on exploitation.

C. Strategic direction 3: protect the marine environment

44. At its meetings in May 2021, the Commission completed its review of the implementation of the environmental management plan for the Clarion-Clipperton Zone and formulated recommendations to the Council on the establishment of four additional areas of particular environmental interest to enhance the effectiveness of the network of areas of particular environmental interest.³¹

45. As requested by the Council in relevant decisions, further progress has been made in developing regional environmental management plans in other priority regions.³² Two virtual workshops were organized in 2020 to support the development of regional environmental management plans for the Area of the northern Mid-Atlantic Ridge and the North-West Pacific Ocean. Additional expert workshops are being planned for 2022.

46. In September 2021, the Commission decided to establish a working group to draft the regional environmental management plan for the Area of the northern Mid-Atlantic Ridge with a focus on polymetallic sulphides deposits, drawing on the results from the expert workshops held to date, with a view to submitting the draft plan for consideration by the Commission at its next session. As part of the discussions on the outline of the draft plan, the working group noted that its work could contribute to work on formulating recommendations regarding a standardized approach to the development of such plans, including a template with indicative elements, as requested by the Council in its decision [ISBA/26/C/10](#).

³¹ See [ISBA/26/C/43](#).

³² See [ISBA/24/C/8](#) and [ISBA/24/C/8/Add.1](#).

D. Strategic direction 4: promote and encourage marine scientific research in the Area

47. The promotion of marine scientific research with respect to activities in the Area, with a particular emphasis on research related to the environmental impact of such activities, is a key focus area for the Authority in accordance with the Convention and the Agreement. This is recognized in the strategic plan and the high-level action plan of the Authority for the period 2019–2023.³³ It is recalled that the General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development as 2021 to 2030. In December 2020, the Assembly of the Authority adopted a decision relating to the action plan of the Authority in support of the United Nations Decade.³⁴ In that respect, a separate report has been prepared for the Assembly on the implementation of the action plan.³⁵

48. From 21 to 25 September 2020, the secretariat held a virtual workshop on DeepData, with a key focus on developing strategic approaches to collaboration to promote the exchange and sharing of deep-sea data and to improve scientific knowledge of deep-sea ecosystems in the Area. Drawing on the outcome of the workshop, the templates for reporting geological and environmental data were updated, and a new template for reporting the submission of metadata was developed. The templates were endorsed by the Legal and Technical Commission in September 2021.³⁶

49. The Authority celebrated World Hydrography Day on 21 June 2021. On that occasion, the Secretary-General reiterated the commitment of the Authority to contributing to advancing the general knowledge and understanding of the world's oceans and to advancing the global mapping of the seabed by 2030.

50. On 8 March 2021, on the occasion of International Day of Women and Girls in Science, the secretariat organized a high-level event to recognize the Authority's commitment to advancing women's empowerment and leadership in deep-sea research. The event also provided an opportunity to formally launch the Women in Deep-Sea Research project, in partnership with the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. The project is aimed at developing specific activities to advance women's empowerment and the leadership of women scientists from the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. Several strategic partnerships have already been established with Governments, international and regional organizations, academia and contractors to implement activities in the four action areas (policy development and advocacy, capacity development, sustainability and partnerships and communication and outreach). The first activities to be undertaken are the gender mapping of women scientists in the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States and the identification of barriers that they could face in their career development. For that purpose, more than 30 members of the Authority have provided a data collection focal point who is currently working with the secretariat.

³³ See [ISBA/24/A/10](#), [ISBA/25/A/15](#) and [ISBA/25/A/15/Corr.1](#).

³⁴ See [ISBA/26/A/17](#).

³⁵ See [ISBA/26/A/25](#).

³⁶ See [ISBA/21/LTC/15/Corr.1](#).

E. Strategic direction 5: build capacity for developing States

51. Between 2020 and 2021, more than 600 individuals have benefited from at least one of the capacity-building/development activities implemented by the Authority, including participation in the workshops that it has organized.

52. In the light of the decision of the Assembly relating to the implementation of a programmatic approach to capacity development,³⁷ in January 2021, the secretariat invited members of the Authority to identify dedicated focal points to facilitate the dissemination at the national level of information on capacity development programmes and activities to be implemented by the Authority. Thus far, 41 focal points have been nominated.³⁸ On 20 April 2021, the secretariat held the first meeting of national focal points, which was followed by the circulation of a survey to identify potential partners at the national level with which the Authority could develop initiatives for training and capacity development and support the work of the secretariat in establishing a network of institutions that could contribute to the implementation of the Authority's dedicated strategy for capacity development. Attention is now being given to organizing the results of the survey to enable the secretariat to reach out to relevant institutions, while further work is needed to finalize a draft capacity development strategy.

53. Between 2020 and 2021, 66 individuals were selected under the contractors' training programme (39 in 2020 and 27 in 2021), including 27 women. Owing to the challenges faced by contractors because of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, some flexibility was given to contractors to either postpone some of their practical training or, in some cases, provide e-learning training instead. To date, 29 out of the 59 practical training placements for 2021 have been converted to remote learning.

54. Global travel restrictions have severely hampered the internship programme of the Authority. Nevertheless, it was possible to host four online and one in-person internships between 2020 and 2021.

55. The third edition of the Secretary-General's Award for Excellence in Deep-Sea Research had to be postponed and reopened for applications in 2021. Seven applications were deemed eligible by the advisory committee appointed by the Secretary-General for evaluating the nominations. The awardee will be announced by the Secretary-General at the meetings of the Assembly in December 2021.

56. From 1 to 3 June 2021, the third regional workshop in the context of the Africa Deep Seabed Resources project was held in a virtual format. The workshop was hosted by the Government of Mauritius, with the support of the African Union and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. The workshop was focused on regulatory processes related to deep-seabed mineral resources exploration and exploitation – including environmental management practices and tools – and the potential benefits for African States of engaging in activities in the Area. About 170 representatives from 21 countries participated in the event, which specifically targeted African States of the Indian Ocean region (Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia and Tanzania). Representatives of competent international and regional organizations, contractors, non-governmental organizations and more than 35 African former trainees of the Authority were also in

³⁷ See [ISBA/26/A/18](#).

³⁸ Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Botswana, Cambodia, Chile, China, Cook Islands, Egypt, Eswatini, Fiji, France, Honduras, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lithuania, Mexico, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nauru, Nepal, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Panama, Poland, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Timor-Leste, Togo, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Viet Nam.

attendance. In parallel, efforts have been made to enable the programme for the deployment of national African experts within the secretariat established under the project to resume. Three experts from Nigeria and Zambia joined the secretariat in November 2021 for a two-month period.

57. In 2021, two national capacity development workshops were organized virtually at the request of Indonesia. One, held in January, was entitled “Enhancing understanding of the legal framework in the Area”, and the other, held in October, was entitled “Environmental components of deep-seabed mining legislation”. Together, the workshops benefited more than 140 individuals representing a large spectrum of national stakeholders, including government officials, policymakers and researchers.

58. The fourth regional workshop under the Abyssal Initiative for Blue Growth project was held virtually from 26 to 29 July 2021. The workshop, which was hosted by the Government of the Cook Islands, was focused on key components of environmental management and monitoring requirements related to activities in the Area. It was jointly organized by the Authority and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, with the support of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. It provided an opportunity for more than 120 participants representing government entities, contractors, observers, regional and international organizations and civil society organizations to exchange information and discuss a wide range of topics. The workshop concluded with a dedicated session in which Pacific small island developing States that are sponsoring activities in the Area further identified their specific capacity development needs in relation to these areas of expertise and discussed ways to address them through strengthened cooperation at both the national and regional levels. Significant progress was also made on another deliverable of the Abyssal Initiative, namely the development of a toolkit relating to the role and responsibilities of sponsoring States, which should be released, after consultation with key regional stakeholders, in early 2022.

59. On 16 September 2021, the secretariat hosted the first webinar of a new series, entitled “International Seabed Authority Marine Scientific Research Information Series for Africa”, which was created specifically for the African member States of the Authority and other stakeholders in the region with a view to strengthening their capacity to conduct research in the Area. The new webinar series complements and builds upon the Africa Deep Seabed Resources project.

60. On 9 November 2020, the Authority and China officially launched the Joint Training and Research Centre, established under the memorandum of understanding that was approved by the Assembly at its twenty-fifth session. The Steering Committee of the Centre met virtually in November 2020 and October 2021, having adopted its rules of procedure and discussed the training plans for 2021 and 2022.

61. On 19 August 2021, the Authority and the Sub-Commission for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission co-organized an online workshop on capacity development related to the deep sea, which was focused on the co-designing of deep-sea research programmes in the Western Tropical Atlantic and Eastern Tropical Pacific regions. About 135 participants, mostly from the Caribbean region, attended the workshop.

62. The secretariat of the Authority, in partnership with the World Bank, through the Environment and International Law Practice Group of its Legal Vice-Presidency, the University of Melbourne Law School, the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Maritime and Oceanic Law Centre at the University of Nantes, collaborated to develop and deliver a training programme on international law related to ocean governance and the legal framework for the blue

economy, including relevant regional conventions, entitled “Ocean Governance Capacity Building”, drawing on each partner’s respective areas of expertise. Thus far, two tranches of the online training have been organized. The first tranche, delivered between 12 April and 6 May 2021, was dedicated to the Pacific region, and the second tranche, delivered between 13 September and 28 October 2021, was dedicated to the Africa region. The Authority led a module entitled “Activities in the Area”.

63. The secretariat, in cooperation with IFREMER and with the support of the Government of France, developed a deep-sea taxonomy postdoctoral fellowship for candidates from developing States Members of the Authority. The 18-month fellowship will be focused on developing and testing new methods and technologies for deep-sea species identification and is expected to begin in February 2022. The fellowship will be part of the IFREMER Blue Revolution project and will involve work on the development and testing of three-dimensional imaging techniques for the identification of meiofauna organisms of deep-sea ecosystems found in areas currently being explored for mineral resources. The fellowship will also contribute to identifying key species that can be used as indicators for assessing potential environmental changes in the future.

64. In a further expansion of its capacity development activities, the secretariat is currently developing a dedicated e-learning platform focusing on all relevant disciplines pertaining to the implementation of the regime of the Area. It is expected that the first selection of trainees will begin in February 2022.

F. Strategic direction 6: ensure fully integrated participation by developing States

65. Ensuring the effective participation of developing States in the work of the Authority and in activities carried out in the Area is essential. In this context, the secretariat developed a series of three publications on the relevance of the Convention to the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States as a contribution to the efforts of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States to facilitate the coordinated implementation of the programmes developed through the United Nations system to benefit those groups of countries.³⁹ The secretariat will organize a high-level event for the public launch of the publications on 16 November 2021.⁴⁰

66. Under this strategic direction, the Authority is required to identify possible approaches to the independent operation of the Enterprise. In this connection, the Legal and Technical Commission, at its meetings in March 2020, considered a study on issues related to the operationalization of the Enterprise and made recommendations to the Council, including those relating to the establishment of the position of Interim Director General of the Enterprise within the secretariat.⁴¹ The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Enterprise issued two reports on his work.⁴²

³⁹ Namely the Istanbul Programme of Action, the Vienna Programme of Action and the Samoa Pathway.

⁴⁰ For more information, see <https://www.isa.org.jm/event/report-launch-law-sea-ocean-opportunity-ldcs-lldcs-and-sids>.

⁴¹ See ISBA/26/C/12.

⁴² ISBA/26/C/15 and ISBA/26/C/46.

G. Strategic direction 7: ensure equitable sharing of financial and other economic benefits

67. At its twenty-fourth session, the Finance Committee began to consider the issue of formulation of rules, regulations and procedures on the equitable sharing of financial and other economic benefits derived from activities in the Area. At its twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth sessions, the Committee continued its discussions on the matter and considered a number of reports requested from the secretariat. At its virtual meetings in June 2021, the Committee agreed to report its findings and considerations to the Council and the Assembly, with a view to seeking guidance on how to proceed. The Committee noted that several issues required clear policy guidance from the Assembly and that it would not be appropriate for it to continue to develop rules, regulations and procedures on equitable sharing without such guidance. The report of the Committee to the Council and the Assembly on the issue of the equitable sharing of benefits is contained in document [ISBA/26/A/24-ISBA/26/C/39](#). In addition, a compilation of the independent studies and reports considered by the Committee has been published as International Seabed Authority Technical Study No. 31.⁴³

H. Strategic direction 8: improve the organizational performance of the Authority

68. With a view to enhancing risk management and compliance assurance in relation to activities in the Area and improving the administration of regulatory standards and guidelines to support the regulatory regime and the relevant database, the Secretary-General has restructured the Contract Management Unit of the secretariat as the Compliance Assurance and Regulatory Management Unit. The responsibilities of the new unit are set out in the most recent Secretary-General's bulletin on the organization of the secretariat.⁴⁴

69. As the Council works towards the adoption of regulations on exploitation of mineral resources in the Area, together with associated standards and guidelines, the Authority will also need to prepare to become an effective regulator of industrial activity. This will require a significant increase in the current capacities of the organs and bodies of the Authority, including the secretariat. In that connection, the Secretary-General issued a report on future financing of the Authority for the consideration by the Finance Committee.⁴⁵ The Committee's consideration of the report is reflected in the report of the Finance Committee.⁴⁶

70. Building on the strategic framework established since 2018, the secretariat also developed its business plan, enabling better coordination and planning among various offices. For example, as part of its disaster recovery plan, the Authority's contingency plan for 2022 involves the following: (a) procurement and deployment of backup servers for off-site locations, both in Jamaica and at its New York liaison office; (b) procurement of a generator to keep its networked server room and leading conference room operational; (c) off-site storage of all its network data using cloud services; and (d) very high frequency radios with a simplex channel for emergency use.

⁴³ See <https://isa.org.jm/files/documents/ISA-Technical-Study-31.pdf>.

⁴⁴ [ISBA/ST/SGB/2021/3](#).

⁴⁵ [ISBA/26/FC/7](#).

⁴⁶ [ISBA/26/A/10/Add.1-ISBA/26/C/21/Add.1](#).

I. Strategic direction 9: commit to transparency

71. The Authority is committed to meaningful and informed engagement with all stakeholders in the work of its different organs and in the advancement of its mandate. This commitment has been reflected in the ongoing stakeholder consultations organized for the development of the draft regulations on exploitation and their associated draft standards and guidelines, as well as other key strategic documents and initiatives, such as the development of the strategic plan and the high-level action plan of the Authority for 2019–2023 and the development of regional environmental management plans.

72. More specifically, the secretariat has developed a draft stakeholder engagement strategy, which was shared for public consultation between December 2020 and February 2021. Its purpose is to inform and guide the Authority’s stakeholders through a detailed presentation of the rules, mechanisms and practices in place through which they can engage in the work of the Authority. An updated draft will be submitted in due course.

IX. Outreach

73. In 2021, the secretariat launched a new webinar series, entitled “Deep DiplomaSea”, to increase the awareness of personnel of permanent missions to the Authority and to the United Nations of the role, mandate and work of the Authority. More than 150 participants attended the two webinars, held in March and July 2021, respectively.

74. On 8 June 2021, the Authority held a virtual event on promoting global knowledge of deep-sea biodiversity for the benefit of humankind to celebrate World Oceans Day.⁴⁷ The secretariat also announced the winners of its art competition organized for World Oceans Day 2021 in two categories, local and international. Artists from South Africa, Italy and the Russian Federation, respectively, won the first, second and third prizes in the international competition. An 11-year-old elementary school student won the local competition.

75. The secretariat, together with interested contractors and other partner organizations, is working on a new initiative aimed at increasing the visibility of the contribution of deep-sea exploration activities conducted in the Area in order to advance the global understanding of deep-sea ecosystems and resources. The initiative will take the form of a compendium highlighting the collective achievements of the contractors in advancing the state of knowledge of the deep sea for the benefit of humanity. The compendium will be published by the end of 2021.

76. Further efforts towards inclusive and transparent communications and awareness-raising activities will be guided by a deep-sea literacy action plan, which has been developed by the secretariat and will be made available by the end of 2021.

⁴⁷ For more information, see <https://www.isa.org.jm/news/world-oceans-day-isa-vows-increase-global-knowledge-deep-sea-biodiversity-benefit-humankind>.