



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza
Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See
25th Session of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority
Agenda Item 9: Annual report of the Secretary-General
Kingston, 23 July 2019

Madam President,

My Delegation is pleased to congratulate Your Excellency on your election as President of this august Assembly and stands ready to offer our cooperation during this jubilee session. We wish also to thank your predecessor, Prof. Mariusz Orion Jędrysek, for his able leadership during the 24th session. We welcome the opportunity to participate in these important discussions, in particular, to consider the annual report of the Secretary-General. In this regard, I would like to highlight three areas particularly encouraging in the said report:

1. Most significant is the progress reported with respect to the **development of the regulatory regime**. In particular, my Delegation supports continued improvement of the **draft mining code** that was discussed last week by the Council, as well as the work being done with respect to the **financial terms** of the contract. We read with interest the *Workshop Report on the Development of **Standards and Guidelines** for Activity in the Area* and look forward to further elaboration of these ideas. We are also grateful for the publication of the *Comparative Study of the Existing **National Legislation** on Deep Seabed Mining* and the establishment of an annual agenda item pertaining to national legislation.

In connection with that study, my Delegation reiterates our comments made last week to the Council in which we noted the importance of national legislation and the role of sponsoring States. We again urge continued focus and greater enlightenment on these issues, with possible assistance to developing States in creating legislation and future work that may include a model law and corresponding legislative guide. My Delegation posits also that national legislation should reinforce protection of the environment. It would be extremely helpful if national legislation provided that States restrict the financing, sale or supply of technology, or other commercial transactions that pose a significant risk of contributing to prohibited activities that may cause harm to the common environment or if this idea could be included in the regulations regarding sponsoring States.

2. With respect to the ongoing supervision of contracts and work of the Authority, my Delegation is encouraged that all contractors have deposited annual reports with the Authority; that all 9 phases of data management are complete and that the environmental data will be available to the public this year with other information to be made public according to a plan; that the website has been improved; and that the Authority has partnered with various organizations. We also support the implementation of a **5-year Strategic Plan** through a **High-Level Action Plan and related indicators** and look forward to discussing it tomorrow.

In addition, my Delegation would like to see further measures taken to ensure transparency and accountability with respect to the decision-making process and the review process for ongoing contracts, especially given the lengthy time frame for operations; greater engagement by the Authority with stakeholders, sponsoring States and coastal States; and the creation of actual job opportunities for those persons from developing States involved in the many training programs.

3. Lastly, the Holy See was pleased with the progress on **environmental** issues, including the support of marine scientific research through a dedicated **endowment fund** that ensures capacity building and training of people from developing States; the further study of and concentration on a **regional approach to assessment** to assist with **regional environmental management plans**; the study of waste and pollution, and the cooperative efforts with the IMO and GESAMP; and the improvement of marine biodiversity assessments using **taxonomic and bathymetric data**, especially through a partnership with IOC-UNESCO.

Given the dire ecological state of our oceans, this component of the work of the Authority is vital. In connection with the work regarding marine scientific research and contract areas, we are hopeful that further consideration will be given to the collection of marine genetic resources (MGRs) located in these areas prior to exploitation and how benefits from this collection of MGRs might be used for the benefit of all under the principle of the common heritage of mankind. We are also interested in further work on the how economic valuation of ocean resources can be accomplished through improved scientific knowledge and the impact this may have on decision-making.

Thank you, Madam President.