



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 11: Commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the
International Seabed Authority*
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Madam President,

The Holy See wishes to express its appreciation that for the past twenty-five years the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has provided a substantial legal framework to regulate our oceans. Various implementing agreements, including that with respect to Part XI, have attempted to amend and supplement provisions in order to make the Convention more effective, particularly in protecting the oceans and making any use of ocean resources sustainable.

However, although the Convention has been in place for twenty-five years and in spite of the various implementing agreements, scientific evidence indicates that the state of our oceans has continued to decline. My Delegation hopes that the current negotiations for a new implementing agreement concerning conservation and sustainable use in areas beyond national jurisdiction and for regulations on exploitation of mineral resources in the Area, along with the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, will turn the tide to restore our oceans to health and sustainability.

My Delegation wishes to avail itself of this commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the entry into force of UNCLOS and the establishment of the International Seabed Authority (ISA) by offering three points for further reflection on the way forward.

The first point is our relationship with our oceans. The planet, and within it the oceans, is a gift entrusted to us for our enjoyment and stewardship. This is enshrined in the principle of the common heritage of mankind. Because it is a trust, we relate to our oceans from the perspective of care and responsibility, and not from that of exploitation and mere use. An approach focused on ensuring economic rights and benefits without fully imposing the related obligations will not ensure neither sustainability nor conservation of our oceans and marine resources nor, consequently, sustained economic benefit.

The second point is the importance of achieving a balance approach to both economic benefits we derive from our ocean resources and the conservation and sustainability of our oceans. While economic benefits help to create the well-being of States and their people, providing food, housing and livelihoods, obligations to safeguard the health of the oceans should not be simply relegated to a secondary importance. Data from scientific research on the state of our oceans must inform every approach to the exploitation of marine resources. Greater harmony between scientific data and business activities in the ocean is imperative to achieve a balance approach. In this regard, my Delegation appreciates the work of the ISA, in partnership with related organizations and scientific bodies, in improving the assessment of biodiversity and the mapping of the ocean seafloor. Data from the collaborative efforts of both the scientific and business sectors are necessary for good decision-making and good regulations.

The third and final point my Delegation would like to raise for further reflection concerns possible conflicts of interest. As the Blue Economy continues to emerge, conflicts between States, overlapping legal instruments, business enterprises and other users will also more likely to emerge. Conflicts of interest could result in the pursuit of the triple objectives of sustainable use and development of resources, enforcing compliance of safety and environmental regulations, and maximizing revenues. The challenge to decision-makers and regulators is to achieve harmony between sustainability of the oceans and marine resources, economic profitability and compliance to regulations, and, where conflicts of interest arise, to ensure that they are resolved fairly and equitably.

As we celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of UNCLOS's entry into force and ISA's establishment, my Delegation is hopeful that both the Convention and the Authority will continue to face wisely the ever-greater challenges in regulating human activities in our oceans and seas.

Thank you, Madam President.