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Sensitization seminar on the work of the International Seabed Authority, held in Abuja, Nigeria, from 24 to 26 March 2009

Note by the Secretariat

1. A sensitization seminar on the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the work of the International Seabed Authority and on marine mineral resources of the South Atlantic Ocean, was convened jointly by the Authority and the Nigerian Inter-ministerial Standing Committee on the International Seabed Authority in Abuja, Nigeria, from 24 to 26 March 2009. The seminar was entitled: Exploration and exploitation of deep seabed mineral resources in the Area: challenges for Africa and opportunities for collaborative research in the South Atlantic Ocean.
2. During November 2008, at a similar sensitization seminar held in Brazil, participants developed a proposal for collaborations by the States bordering the South and Equatorial Atlantic Ocean for increased research on the mineral resources in that part of the Area. The seminar in Nigeria discussed that proposal and possible collaboration to that end among the States of the region.
3. The seminar was inaugurated by the Honourable Minister of Transport of the Government of Nigeria, Alhaji Ibrahim Isa Bio. Mr. Alhaji commended the efforts of the International Seabed Authority to ensure that all nations, especially developing countries, are part of the deep seabed mineral resources development process. He urged African nations to become actively involved in the work of the Authority for the socio-economic benefit of the region. The Honourable Governor (Chief Servant) of Niger State and Chairman of the session, Dr. Muazu Babangida Aliyu, highlighted the importance of the seminar and said that it would create much needed awareness of the activities of the Authority and the enormous potential for commercial mining of deep seabed minerals in the Equatorial and South Atlantic Ocean. The Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority, Nii Odunton, speaking on the occasion, assured the gathering that the Authority would provide whatever assistance was possible to the region in its efforts to develop deep-sea mineral resources.

4. The technical sessions at the seminar were broadly grouped under four themes, as follows:

(a) The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of the Convention:

Two talks were delivered under this topic. Former Secretary-General of the Authority, Satya N. Nandan, spoke on the contents and achievements of the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea, tracing its history and success. Secretary-General Odunton made a presentation on the role, functions and organs of the Authority, in which he provided a detailed account of the composition and functions of each of its organs. He highlighted the activities and achievements of the Authority, and provided an insight into the adoption of rules, procedures and regulations for the conduct of activities in the Area.

(b) Other institutions created by the Convention:

Under this topic three presentations were made, namely, by Judge Helmut Turk, vice-president of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, spoke on its role and functions. Judge Turk said that, although at present the services of the Tribunal were underutilized, there was bound to be a more active role for it in the future in the settlement of maritime disputes. Isaac Oduro, of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, spoke about the work of the Commission and he provided information on how the outer limit of the Continental Shelf was established. He also spoke about the submissions that had been made to the Commission by States parties. Finally, Michael Shewchuk spoke about the Division of Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. He informed participants that the Division acted as the secretariat for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and for the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement, and discharged other responsibilities entrusted under those instruments.

(c) The work of the International Seabed Authority:

Under this theme, a total of eight presentations were made, covering the known deep-sea mineral resources and the work of the Authority. Jin Jiancai made a presentation on the different types and distribution of marine mineral resources. He emphasized the role of marine scientific research in the location and development of those resources and provided insight into the work of the China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association (COMRA) as a contractor with the Authority. The Legal Counsel of the Authority, Michael Lodge, provided the legal framework for activities in the Area, with special emphasis on the regulations for prospecting and exploration for polymetallic nodules. A detailed scientific account of the evaluation and exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the South and Equatorial Atlantic Ocean was provided by Professor Peter Halbach. A similar account of the polymetallic sulphides of the Equatorial and South Atlantic Ocean was presented by Dr. Georgy Cherkashov. Vijay Kodagali, Senior Scientific Officer of the Authority, made a presentation on the geological model

developed by the Authority for polymetallic nodule deposits in the Clarion-Clipperton fracture zone of the Pacific Ocean, and provided a brief account of the results of the resource assessment of those deposits. Dr. Kim Juniper made a presentation on the protection and preservation of the marine environment from proposed activities in the Area, with a focus on polymetallic sulphide deposits. Baidy Diene of Senegal (member of Legal and Technical Commission of the Authority) made a presentation on the Authority's Endowment Fund programme and its role in the promotion and encouragement of marine scientific research. He exhorted the African region to make full use of the fund for capacity-building. Dr. Rahul Sharma of the National Institute of Oceanography in Goa, India, made a presentation on developing national capabilities for seabed mineral development. He traced the events in India where a group of 30 professionals was initiated in deep-sea mineral exploration 28 years ago, which had helped the country in getting an area of the seabed allocated to it for polymetallic nodule exploration. Dr. Sharma informed participants that the group had also diversified its activities into other marine mineral deposits.

(d) Possible areas of collaboration among West and Central African States and among States bordering South and Equatorial Atlantic Oceans:

Under this theme, a total of three presentations were made. E. K. Bekee, of the Petroleum Resources Division of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, made a presentation on the development of offshore hydrocarbon resources in Nigeria and its applicability to the region. He spoke about deep-sea hydrocarbon resource exploration, and how Nigeria could help the countries in the region in developing their resources. Dr. O. A. Ayinla spoke on the research and capacity-building activities of the Nigerian Institute for Oceanography and Marine Research and the possible role it could play in West Africa. He said that the organization was engaged mostly in biological oceanography and fisheries resources and technology research and emphasized the need to expand into geological and other oceanographic research. The final presentation on the theme was made by Dr. Kaiser De Souza, Head of the Marine Geology Division, Geological Survey of Brazil. He spoke on the proposed collaborative project by countries bordering the South Atlantic and presented the work of his Division and capabilities which could be shared with the countries of Africa.

5. At the conclusion of the seminar and on behalf of the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the International Seabed Authority, H.E. Mr. Peter Oyedele, thanked all participants, invited experts, and the International Seabed Authority for the seminar. He noted that this had been the first sensitization seminar to be convened in Africa on the work of the Authority and emphasized the need for African States to participate in the meetings of the Authority and to organize themselves internally to be better able to take advantage of the benefits that would accrue from the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as they related to marine areas within national jurisdiction and in the Area.

6. The presentations at the seminar were very well received by the audience. Over 120 participants from different organizations from Nigeria and bordering countries such as Kenya, Cameroon, Ghana and Senegal, took part in the deliberations. Each of the presentations was followed by lively question and answer sessions, in which participants directed pertinent queries to the speakers. At the end of the sessions, the participants deliberated on the outcome and recommendations of the sensitization seminar. Plenary discussions also centred on the theme of collaboration amongst the countries bordering the South Atlantic region. Everyone agreed in principle on the need for cooperation in order to move ahead. The main recommendations of the seminar are that:

- (a) African member States of the International Seabed Authority:
 - (i) Participate more actively in deliberations at sessions of the Authority and its seminars and workshops;
 - (ii) Organize more and frequent sensitization seminars at the country level;
 - (iii) Establish dedicated inter-ministerial working groups to coordinate activities in their marine sectors, with a view to devising plans to optimize resource development in this sector and in the Area, taking into account the relevant provisions of the Convention;
 - (iv) Encourage their nationals, through existing and new institutions, to develop the appropriate skills in marine sciences, protection of the marine environment and resource development to take advantage of the economic possibilities that have been made available by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea;
 - (v) Facilitate intra-African and international cooperation to obtain the necessary skills and resources to develop the mineral and fisheries resources within their exclusive economic zones, extended continental shelves and in the Area;
 - (vi) Establish the necessary framework to make effective use of the Authority's endowment fund and source funds from other donors for human resources development and training in the region;
 - (vii) Explore with the assistance of the Authority, possibilities of cooperation with polymetallic nodule contractor countries to get hands-on experience in marine mineral resource exploration and environmental studies;
 - (viii) Actively pursue the proposals for cooperation with Brazil and India, as proposed in their respective presentations;
- (b) The Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority address the next Heads of State meeting of the African Union to sensitize the policymakers on marine mineral resources of the Area, and the need for the region to be actively engaged in this programme;
- (c) Requests all African countries to participate in this global programme to forestall the possibility of missing out on the benefits accruable from the "Common Heritage of Mankind".