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STATEMENT

by

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A few weeks ago, on 16 November, an important milestone was commemorated, as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, one of the most comprehensive treaties in the history of international law, reached twenty-five years of age since its entry into force. The Convention, the Ocean treaty, has stood the test of time and remains relevant to address contemporary challenges.

Today's near-universality character of the Convention has been reached thanks to the resolution of the outstanding issues related to Part XI through the conclusion of the 1994 Agreement; the Convention's first implementing Agreement is to be interpreted and applied as single instrument together with Part XI of the Convention.

One of the most significant consequences of the Convention was the establishment of an international machinery to control and administer the seabed and its mineral resources beyond the limits of national jurisdiction for the benefit of mankind as whole.

That machinery acquired a concrete expression through the establishment of the International Seabed Authority. Across this 25-year journey, the members of the Authority have been working together to build a solid institutional architecture and an ever-growing regulatory framework for the oversight of the activities in the Area, and which currently constitutes the most comprehensive and equitable regime to govern the access to and utilization of the mineral resources and the protection of the marine environment in areas beyond national jurisdiction. This, certainly, has been a remarkable achievement.

In this context, I wish to commend the General Assembly for having recognized in the draft resolution the far-reaching implications of this great achievement by noting with satisfaction the Special Commemorative Session on the occasion of twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Authority.

On the same line, I express my appreciation to the General Assembly for welcoming in the draft resolution the adoption of the high-level action plan and performance indicators developed for each of the strategic directions found in the strategic plan of the Authority for the period 2019–2023, which, as accurately described in the draft resolution, provides a uniform basis for the strengthening of existing working practices of the Authority.

I am grateful to the General Assembly for highlighting the serious issue of arrears of contributions to the Authority and to the Tribunal. As of today, only 64, or 38%, of members have paid their assessed contributions for 2019. Ten members of the Authority have never paid any contributions whatsoever since joining the Convention. Just over \$1 million is owed in contributions outstanding for more than two years. This is not acceptable and places an undue burden on those who do pay their contributions. I urge all member States to redouble their efforts to ensure that contributions are paid on time and in full.

I wish now to highlight three other significant ongoing processes in the Authority, which not only map the work ahead during 2020, but also have major implications for ocean governance in areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

First, the Council of the Authority is currently seized with the negotiation of the draft exploitation regulations. Upon the invitation of the Council at its July session, 39 written submissions were received in total from Members, observers and stakeholders. In compliance with the decision of the Council, and well-ahead of the fixed deadline, a compilation of the proposals and observations sent by members of the Council and a compilation of proposals and observations sent by other States members of the Authority, observers and other stakeholders, are available as of today on the Authority's website. In addition, the secretariat has prepared a note providing a broad overview of the main issues raised in the written submissions in connection to the draft regulations. The note is also available in the website in the form of an unedited advance text. The Council will continue its negotiations during its forthcoming meeting which will take place from 17 to 21 February 2020. The next meeting of the Council will be preceded by the third meeting of the open ended informal working group to discuss the economic model for deep seabed mining that will form the basis for the financial terms of contracts. I look forward to the broadest possible participation in those meetings.

A second major development, and as appropriately encouraged by the draft resolution, relates to the implementation of the strategy endorsed by the Council to develop regional environmental management plans. Recently, at the end of November, a workshop on the regional environmental management plan of the northern Mid-Atlantic Ridge took place in Évora, Portugal. The workshop was made possible by the kind collaboration of the Government of Portugal and the European Commission. One of its objectives was to advance the description of potential areas that could be impacted by extractive mineral activities in the Area and that would require enhanced management measures for marine biodiversity protection through area-based management tools. The process of development of regional environmental management plans, which the Council had decided to be undertaken under the auspices of the Authority, affords a unique opportunity to 'get it right' from the start, and serves as a tangible expression of the Authority's commitment to the protection of marine biodiversity and the application of a precautionary approach in accordance with its mandate under the Convention.

This brings me to my third point. Benefits for humanity and a global system for the protection of the marine environment will not be complete without a long-term engagement to deliver on capacity-building needs, in line with the priorities identified by States. That is why, the Authority, on the basis of a proposal by the African group, will organize a workshop in Kingston from 10 to 12 February 2020, on “Capacity development, resources and needs assessment” with a view to improve the delivery of capacity-building programmes and initiatives by the International Seabed Authority. Everyone is welcomed.

After outlining those three major ongoing processes under the auspices of the Authority, I must highlight that the secretariat alone will not be able to meet those ambitious goals alone without the active and committed engagement of the international community as a whole. We need everybody on board working together. By doing so, I am convinced that in the next twenty-five years, the Authority and the framework provided under Part XI of the Convention will further consolidate as one of the most successful projects in the history of international relations.

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