



Sustainable Blue Economy Conference

Plenary session:

Sustainable energy, mineral resources and innovative industries

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KEYNOTE SPEECH

by

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[Check Against Delivery – 10 minutes]

Excellencies

Distinguished Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to be here in Nairobi for this first global conference entirely dedicated to advancing our understanding of the opportunities and challenges arising from a shift to an inclusive and sustainable Blue Economy for all.

I would like to congratulate the Government of Kenya for the successful organization of this Conference and express our sincere thanks for the warm welcome we have received. Also, I am deeply honored to have been invited to be part of this panel of renowned and esteemed experts.

Today I would like to offer a few thoughts on the potential contribution of marine minerals to a sustainable Blue Economy and on the role of the International Seabed Authority in realizing this potential.

Mining and metals are essential to global economic and social development and an integral part of any foreseeable economy and society. As the world's population continues to grow, from 7 billion today to 9.6 billion in 2050, the demand for critical minerals will continue to increase. Estimates vary, but if mineral demand were to increase at a 1 per cent annual rate, as predicted by the U.S. Geological Survey, it will be about 60 per cent higher than today by 2050. For specific commodities, the increase may be much higher. For example, the European Commission estimates that demand for copper – one of the key minerals of interest for deep seabed mining – could increase by up to 341 per cent by 2050 compared to 2010. It is possible that some of this increase could be absorbed by improved recycling and materials substitution but the long-term trend remains.

To achieve the objective of a future society based on renewable energy and technology, it will be critical to find new sources of reliable, clean and ethically sourced mineral resources.

We can of course, continue to exploit dwindling mineral resources on land. We can dig deeper and explore more and more remote locations. But there are other choices too. The deep seabed harbours the largest untapped mineral resource known to mankind, sufficient to support global demand for critical minerals for hundreds of years into the future.

The question is how do we utilize this resource in a way that is sustainable, provides long term economic benefits for present and future generations, and does not cause harm to the marine environment.

Fortunately, the answer to these questions are given to us by the incredible foresight of the architects of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which set aside the mineral resources of the deep seabed beyond national jurisdiction – some 54% of the global ocean floor – as the common heritage of mankind, to be utilized for the benefit of mankind as a whole.

The international machinery through which this regime is to be implemented is the International Seabed Authority. The legal regime rests on four fundamental principles:

- Access to the deep seabed can be permitted only through the International Seabed Authority and under the conditions established by the Authority. In essence, the entire seabed is closed to any form of extractive activity except as permitted by States Parties to the Law of the Sea

Convention acting through the International Seabed Authority. This ensures the highest degree of environmental protection.

- The regime is based on the sovereign equality of States. The Convention guarantees the rights of all States, rich and poor, to access seabed mineral resources and assures equality of access to developing States, including the land-locked and geographically disadvantaged, as well as Small Island Developing States. Access is not limited to the wealthy and technologically advanced States, but is equally available to the smallest and least developed.
- The financial and other economic benefits from deep seabed resources must be shared fairly and justly, in such a way as to benefit all humanity.
- Environmental protection is front and centre of the Authority's responsibilities under the Convention. Seabed mineral exploitation cannot be permitted to proceed unless the Authority is satisfied that rigorous environmental safeguards are in place through globally applicable regulations that are binding upon member States.

The regime established by the Law of the Sea Convention has been an outstanding success. The Authority has 168 members, including the EU and all its member States, as well as 48 African States. All regions of the world are represented.

As of today, the Authority has approved 29 contracts for exploration involving 22 different countries and covering more than 1.3 million square kilometers, or just over 1%, of the seabed. Twelve of these contracts have been signed or sponsored by developing countries, including five Small Island Developing States. For these States, particularly those that lack resources on land, seabed mining has the potential to become an integral part of a transition towards a sustainable Blue Economy by expanding their resource base and building human and technological capacity and expertise.

The benefits to mankind of deep seabed exploration extend far beyond knowledge of the mineral resources and shared financial benefits from future mining, but also include scientific knowledge of the marine environment that will be critical to realizing all aspects of the Blue Economy, including knowledge of marine biodiversity.

This is one reason why the Authority is an enthusiastic supporter of initiatives such as the UN Decade of Ocean Science, led by IOC-UNESCO. It is also the explicit responsibility of the Authority to promote and encourage marine scientific research in the deep seabed and develop capacity among developing States to help realize the benefits of the Convention.

In this context, I want to take the opportunity to highlight some of the Voluntary Commitments registered by the Authority at the 2017 UN Ocean Conference. Each one of these carefully formulated commitments involves the establishment of pragmatic partnerships aimed at achieving concretely one or more goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. Five of them are directly oriented to reinforce the Authority's efforts towards developing countries and in particular, SIDS and LDCs.

- In the area of marine science we have pledged to work with partner organizations and institutions to increase knowledge of deep sea biodiversity and ecological processes and functions.
- We have also committed to concrete actions to enhance the role of women in marine scientific research, particularly qualified women from developing countries. As part of our recent capacity-building initiatives, I am proud to say we have reached as many as 259 individuals, including 107 women, which represents 41% of the total.
- We have pledged to work with UN-DESA to increase socio-economic benefits for SIDS through sustainable development of deep-sea mineral resources as part of their Blue Economy.
- And last, but not least, we have established a partnership with the African Minerals Development Centre of UNECA and the African Union to help improve governance of Africa's deep seabed resources.

This last point brings me on to the work that still needs to be done.

We need to continue to increase participation in the Convention and the work of the Authority in particular. Despite increased activity, there still remain 26 States that are not yet Party to the Convention, including 7 African States and 12 landlocked States. It is essential that we move closer to the goal of universal participation.

As we move towards the realization of seabed mining, the Authority is putting in place the rules and regulations to ensure a sound and rigorous regulatory framework for commercial exploitation. These include environmental protections as well as the financial terms that will affect all States. I can think of no other activity in the ocean where we have had the luxury to put the rules into place before the activity takes place, and I urge all States to participate fully in this process. It is a unique opportunity to get things right.

Let me end by going back to where I started and underlining that reliable, clean and ethically sourced mineral resources are essential to the needs of a future society based on renewable energy and technology. The developing world has a critical role to play in this, including African Leaders since most future growth will take place in Africa and Asia, where the demand for better quality of life will drive the need to access better goods and services.

If we look at the way in which the offshore oil and gas sector developed over the past 50 years, we can predict that by 2050, up to 15% of global mineral demand could be met from the deep seabed. This presents a unique opportunity for all of us to work together to realize the benefits of a Blue Economy through the legal regime set out in the Convention in a way that builds prosperity while conserving our oceans for future generations.

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