



ASEAN & BIMSTEC Workshop of Deep Seabed Resources and the Blue Economy

Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar

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OPENING REMARKS

by

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I am delighted to welcome you all to the first-ever ISA workshop on deep sea resources and the Blue Economy that has been convened specifically for countries of the ASEAN and BIMSTEC regions.

I especially wish to thank our hosts, the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, and particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education.

You have been committed to the successful organization of this workshop since the very beginning and I believe that we can already see the results of that in the magnificent arrangements that have been made to welcome us to Nya Pyi Taw.

A special thank you also to our co-sponsor for this event, the Korea Maritime Institute. KMI's many activities in support of the law of the sea are very well known to many of us and I particularly want to mention the annual Yeosu Academy, which just finished its 2019 session last week, and which ISA has been pleased to support since the beginning. We are delighted that KMI is supporting this workshop and hope that this marks the beginning of a new partnership between us.

This workshop has been long in the planning. Indeed, I had committed to a workshop in Myanmar immediately after taking office in 2017. Unfortunately, there had been some delays for various reasons, but I am delighted that we are finally here, and also that we are holding the workshop in the year that ISA also celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary, making this event doubly special.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Law of the Sea Convention is also an event of significance for ASEAN and BIMSTEC, given the strong commitment of both of those groupings to the rule of law in the ocean, as implemented through the Convention.

This is amply demonstrated by the commitment that States in this region have shown to the work of the International Seabed Authority over the years.

Myanmar, for example, has participated in every session of the Authority since 1994, and has also contributed a series of knowledgeable experts to the Finance Committee, one of the most important bodies within the Authority.

India and Singapore have both sponsored exploration contracts in the international seabed Area. India in fact has been active since the 1980s and was the first of the registered pioneer investors following the adoption of the Convention in 1982.

Indonesia, Singapore, India, Viet Nam and Bangladesh have all served at various times as members of the Council of the Authority.

Others have benefited from several of the capacity-building initiatives of the Authority which we will hear more about during the workshop.

So clearly this region has a strong interest in the law of the sea and the work of the Authority and the need for a workshop like this is amply justified.

However, the objectives of this workshop are broader in that we also recognize the need to consider the implementation of international law through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, in the context of the Blue Economy as a whole, and particularly in the context of the implementation of Agenda 2030 and accelerating progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 14 - the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.

In this connection, the regime established by the Convention is of critical importance. Not only does it provide the best example we have of a legal regime for the shared management of global public goods, but also it establishes a coherent platform for international cooperation.

As we begin to understand better the way in which the ocean is of fundamental importance to life on earth, including its role in regulating the climate as well as providing the fundamental ecosystem services to support human life, effective international cooperation in collecting and sharing knowledge of ocean resources becomes ever more critical.

As far as the deep ocean is concerned, it is clear that the benefits to humanity 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.

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.

As of today, the Authority has approved 30 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.

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 this region, 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.

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 are working 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.

You will see that, so far, we have no specific partnerships in this region. That is one reason why I am very keen, during this workshop, to listen to all of you so that we can understand your specific needs in terms of capacity-building and thus enable the Authority to better understand your priorities and align our programmes accordingly. I hope that you will take the opportunity over the next two days to have a discussion between yourselves and with the experts gathered here to make some suggestions as to how ISA can best support your needs.

Once again, I congratulate Myanmar on providing us with the time and space to have such a conversation and I look forward to the discussions over the next two days.

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