

Statement BELGIUM 40th anniversary of UNCLOS during 27th session ISA Assembly (01/08/2022).

Honorable Ministers, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

On the onset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, for your appointment as Acting President. Furthermore, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Foreign Affairs Kamina Johnson-Smith, Jamaica and the Jamaican people for the 60th anniversary of the Independence of Jamaica. I hope we can continue to celebrate this anniversary throughout the week. The Belgian delegation is equally delighted to join in the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We warmly thank the Secretary General of the ISA for the initiative of putting this on the Agenda of the Assembly.

As said before by many delegations, the Convention sets out the legal framework within which all activities in oceans and seas must be carried out. It is rightly considered as the Constitution of the oceans, and is one of the most robust and far-sighted instruments ever adopted. Its provisions generally reflect customary international law, and are thus binding on all States.

UNCLOS, which recognizes the profound interrelatedness of all the problems of ocean space and the need to consider them as a whole, is indeed a critical part of the rules-based international order. Among many other things, it creates a framework for the protection and preservation of the marine environment, and marine scientific research. The respect of the precautionary principle is hereby key. In this context, we wish to pay tribute to the sterling work accomplished by and within the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and, of course, the International Seabed Authority.

The Convention remains as pertinent as ever to tackle new and emerging issues, and in this respect to support the UN SG's Common Agenda and its roadmap for the development and effective implementation of international law. The future BBNJ agreement will constitute a major legal framework to address the preservation of the marine environment, the sustainability of resources and the conservation of ecosystems in areas beyond national jurisdiction. The Belgian delegation is confident that an ambitious and universal agreement will be reached at the 5th Conference later in August this year.

Distinguished delegates,

It is timely to recall that all parties have the responsibility to promote, and apply in good faith the provisions of UNCLOS, particularly as we wish to promote this "important contribution to the maintenance of peace, justice and progress for all peoples of the world". It is therefore important that we as States maintain the integrity of UNCLOS, to respect all its provisions, and to condemn any attempt to restrict, undermine, or disregard this unique instrument.

In this context, Belgium reiterates its full commitment to UNCLOS and its two implementing agreements and sincerely hopes that the goal of universal participation in this Convention will one day be met.
