



Symposium on Global Maritime Cooperation & Ocean Governance 2022

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STATEMENT

by

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Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to participate once again in this important symposium.

My sincere appreciation goes to my friend, Dr WU Shicun and all friends and colleagues at the China-Southeast Asia Research Centre on the South China Sea for inviting me to contribute to the discussions today.

I would like to use the opportunity today to say a few words about the importance of effective multilateralism and international cooperation as it relates to ocean governance and specifically the governance of the deep seabed beyond national jurisdiction.

Since 1970, the deep seabed and the mineral resources it contains have been regarded as the common heritage of mankind.

In conferring that status, the international community recognized that the peaceful, secure, and sustainable use of this shared space and resource would benefit all humanity today and into the future.

To manage this space, and to realize the vision of the common heritage of mankind, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea established a comprehensive governance architecture, in the form of the International Seabed Authority. All States parties to the Convention are ipso facto members of the Authority and therefore have the right and the responsibility to participate in the governance regime.

The objective of the Convention and its 1994 Implementation Agreement is to ensure not only that access to deep sea minerals is available equally to all States, rich and poor, developed and developing, but also that the benefits are shared equitably.

These benefits are measured not just in the form of future mineral royalties that will be collected and distributed by the Authority, but also in the form of greater availability of the metals we will need for a sustainable future, careful stewardship of the marine environment, and equitable access for all countries to scientific knowledge of the deep sea.

Today, we live in an era of renewed interest in exploration and use of the deep sea and its resources. The number of exploration projects in the deep seabed has increased from six in 2001 to 31 in 2022. These projects involve twenty-two different countries, including China, twelve of which are developing States.

As demand for minerals continues to expand, exploration contractors have already started to develop and evaluate mining technology with a view to exploitation in the coming years. We are in the process of establishing a comprehensive regulatory framework to manage these future activities.

At the same time, there is increased concern globally for the health of the marine environment. This concern is only likely to increase further as our global dependence on the resources provided by the ocean also increases. The challenges ahead of us is to ensure that any activities undertaken in the ocean will be done based on a precautionary approach which will enable us to find innovative ways to effectively manage the pressures on the marine environment.

In today's interdependent and connected world, no individual State can address challenges of this nature. International cooperation for the common good is indispensable.

In this regard, the legal regime for the deep seabed offers a concrete example of successful collective action as a response to the challenges of managing global public goods and common resources.

The vision embodied in the Convention could easily have failed without the committed support of its member States.

Today, however, this comprehensive governance system has the full and active support of 168 States parties, as well as the participation of ninety-four observers. No State or entity has chosen to act outside the single regime established by the Convention and the 1994 Implementation Agreement, which itself indicates the strength of the regime.

Without the Authority, we could easily have seen rampant unrestrained exploitation of the deep seabed. Instead, we have the benefit of more than 40 years of carefully managed deep-sea exploration which has massively expanded our collective understanding and knowledge of the ocean at large.

As a result of this research, we have massively improved our understanding of geological processes in the Earth's upper mantle. We have developed a holistic understanding of the relevant processes for the formation of manganese nodules and identified the prime ocean basins for their enrichment. We have discovered new mineral resources, including polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich crusts and advanced our understanding of hydrothermal circulation as the prime process for crustal cooling at mid-ocean ridges and the high number of hydrothermal vent sites along ocean ridges. We also have a much better understanding of mid-ocean ridge geometries, formations, spreading rates, overlaps, tectonic and volcanic activities.

In terms of ecology, we have recognized that the deep sea is the largest environment on Earth, supporting a particularly high biodiversity, but also that no part of the ocean is completely untouched by anthropogenic activity. Most of that activity of course, is on land. At the same time, however, we have significantly increased our understanding of deep-sea biodiversity and the measures necessary to ensure its proper conservation and management.

The same scientific knowledge also plays a critical role in informing the development of evolving rules governing future exploitation. It is particularly noteworthy that these rules are being developed before any extractive activity begins.

We cannot take these successes for granted.

As the Secretary-General of the United Nations has emphasized in his report on “Our Common Agenda”, even more decisive collective action is needed to strengthen the governance of our global commons and global public goods. This can only happen through renewed commitment to multilateralism and finding ways of working together that are suited to the challenges we face and the diverse landscape of actors that have the capacity to contribute to solutions.

In the case of the deep seabed, I wish to highlight three areas where increased international cooperation is important.

First, the systematic approach to scientific knowledge is essential if we are to effectively manage the pressures on the marine environment created by our increased dependence on ocean resources.

That is why the promotion and encouragement of marine scientific research in the Area is one of the foremost responsibilities of the Authority. The emphasis on marine science is clearly reflected in the strategic plan and the high-level action plan of the Authority for the period of 2019-2023 and even more prominently in the Authority’s action plan in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

I invite all of you to join the efforts engaged and work with us to advance the global knowledge and understanding of the deep-sea for the benefit of all humankind.

Second, it is even more imperative now that we redouble our efforts to come together to develop and implement a comprehensive set of rules and standards governing deep-seabed mining and related activities. It is only through the development and implementation of globally agreed rules and standards that the international community can balance the imperative need for resource extraction with the preservation of the marine environment.

The goal should be a regime that is crafted in a way that fully respects the proper application of the precautionary approach yet is consistent with the social, economic, and environmental aspirations of the sustainable development goals.

Third, we must do more to give real substance to the interests of all humanity in the ocean and the conservation and sustainable use of its resources. The entirety of the Convention was based on the premise that the resources of the ocean should not be reserved exclusively for the wealthy and technologically advanced States but should be distributed to all based on equity. It is incumbent on all of us to ensure that developing States can participate fully in ocean science, technology and governance and benefit from the results.

The global governance regime must reflect the maritime interests of all States, whether coastal or landlocked, and with due consideration for the specific needs of the most vulnerable groups, such as the landlocked countries and small island developing States.

This is an issue that is particularly important for the Authority and something that lies at the heart of our mandate under the Convention.

It is true that important progress has been made in recent years, but more can be done.

I urge all States parties to support the Authority in this important work and to work with us to ensure the stewardship of the Area and its resources for the benefit of the whole humanity.

I thank you.
