

28th International Seabed Authority Assembly, Agenda Item 8

Statement delivered by Alex Herman (Cook Islands)

25 July 2023

Thank you Mr President,

Firstly, we join others in welcoming Rwanda as the newest member State of the International Seabed Authority.

My delegation wishes to join others in thanking the Secretary General for his very comprehensive report. The breadth and quality of this report speaks to the high calibre of work undertaken by the International Seabed Authority in the space of one year.

The Cook Islands reiterates our full support for the ISA as the body entrusted with the stewardship of the Area. The ISA has been given the authority and mandate by 169 member States and the EU, which includes:

the management of activities in the Area on behalf of humankind,

the protection of the marine environment,

the promotion and encouragement of marine scientific research and

the sharing of benefits on the basis of equity.

As a State party to UNCLOS, and more particularly as a Small Island Developing State, we place a very high value on the principles and rights enshrined under UNCLOS.

Rights that we acknowledge were the result of decades of difficult negotiations and compromise between States, resulting in a carefully balanced package and framework.

In navigating our way forward, we must always uphold the integrity of UNCLOS.

It is not easy work. It relies on good faith, cooperation, multilateralism and a rules based order to implement our collective UNCLOS obligations.

I trust that we will all continue to advance the spirit and intent of UNCLOS - and especially the interests and aspirations of developing countries.

On that note, I wish to support the comments of other delegations who have also reflected those sentiments on the floor.

Let me also take this opportunity to support and align with the statement delivered by the Kingdom of Tonga on the High Level Panel which also included the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati and Nauru.

Mr President,

If we can make some further general comments:

Firstly, we all share a concern to protect our marine environment.

While we may have differing approaches, we are all united in our commitment to ensure the protection of the ocean and the marine environment.

And, in line with the precautionary approach and precautionary principle – we all agree on the need for a robust regulatory framework to be put in place, based on scientific evidence, that ensures the effective protection of the marine environment before any decisions on the exploitation of seabed minerals can occur.

As expressed by other delegations, the Cook Islands does not intend to place terminologies or labels on our views.

Rather, we will focus on the common interests and common concerns that we all have – as we consider that will help pave the way forward.

Turning now to the specific elements of the Secretary General's report:

Firstly, my delegation congratulates the ISA on the significant progress made in implementing the various high-level actions and associated outputs identified in the Strategic Plan for 2019-2023. We also recognise the ISA's contribution towards the 2030 Agenda, noting the ISA has contributed to 12 of the 17 SDGs.

Mr President,

We welcome the ISA's efforts to advance women empowerment and leadership in ocean affairs and deep-sea scientific research.

To that end, the Cook Islands is humbled and honoured to hear the congratulations that delegations have extended to Rima Browne on the floor.

As our Prime Minister, the Honourable Mark Brown shared yesterday, along with other delegations – this is a significant achievement not only for Rima, but also for the Cook Islands, and for our Pacific region.

The Cook Islands is proud to also support the Women in Deep Sea Research project.

On that note, we are pleased to announce that our sponsored entity CIIC has recently pledged to allocate 50% of their training opportunities to qualified women applicants.

Mr President,

We reiterate the importance of scientific research for the effective management of the Area, and we thank the ISA for promoting and encouraging Marine Scientific Research in the Area for the benefit of all, including Pacific Small Island Developing States. To that end, we acknowledge and support the ISA's MSR Action Plan as well as the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative

We also acknowledge the contribution of contractors as well as scientific and research institutions in building the growing body of scientific knowledge in the Area. While it is taking time for this work

to be independently verified and peer reviewed - we are already seeing the new scientific information that is shining a light on previous unknowns.

It is through rigorous and independent science that we can make informed decision-making about this industry.

Mr President,

On the capacity building of developing States,

I take this opportunity to highlight the Abyssal Initiative for Blue Growth supported by the ISA, UN DESA, Norway, the Pacific Community, and the Pacific Islands Forum to name a few. This initiative was aimed at strengthening the capacities of PSIDS Sponsoring States, and included workshops on:

- The Role and Responsibilities of Sponsoring States;
- Marine Scientific Research
- Deep Seabed Environmental Management and Monitoring - and
- Equitable benefit sharing

It is through capacity building initiatives such as this, that has helped Pacific Island countries to increase and solidify our understanding and knowledge on these respective issues.

We also acknowledge with support the African Deep Seabed Resources project.

The Abyssal Initiative Project and the ADSR Project are success stories for capacity building – and we look forward to more of these initiatives in order to achieve the intent of UNCLOS and the particular consideration for developing states.

Mr President,

My delegation is pleased to see the continued progress on the draft Exploitation Regulations, including in this latest Council session, where we now have a roadmap towards completing a fit for purpose regulatory regime.

With robust laws in place, and science-based decision making, we can ensure the highest level of environmental protection of our ocean and also realise the vision of UNCLOS for the common heritage of humankind.

In closing, we once again thank the Secretary General for this comprehensive report.

We also reiterate the Cook Islands support for the work of the ISA, and our commitment towards upholding the integrity of UNCLOS,

I thank you Mr President.