



**Thirty-third Meeting of States Parties to the
United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**

*Agenda item 9: 'Information reported by the Secretary-General of the
International Seabed Authority.'*

New York

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STATEMENT

by

Mr. Michael W. Lodge

Secretary-General, International Seabed Authority

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Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

It is a pleasure as always to present information about the work of the Authority to the thirty-third meeting of States Parties to the Convention.

Let me begin by offering my congratulations to you Mr. President on your election. It is a great pleasure to see you in this position and I trust that your leadership will guide efficiently the discussion.

I wish to thank Ambassador Vanessa Frazier from Malta for her work during the past year and in particular her support for the work of the Authority.

Let me also extend my thanks and appreciation to the Legal Counsel and his team for his consistent support and our collaboration, including in the context of UN Oceans.

I further wish to extend my congratulations and appreciation to the States Parties for their constant support to the mandate and the work of the Authority. The active participation and constructive engagement of so many delegations during the twenty-seventh session of the Authority and the first part of the twenty-eighth session is testament of the strong commitment of State Parties to ensure the effective implementation of the Convention and the 1994 Agreement.

In my statement today I shall briefly outline the progress that has been made on some of the key aspects of the work of the Authority and highlight some of the critical issues for consideration during the upcoming twenty-eighth session.

It is impossible in the time available to provide a comprehensive overview of the richness and diversity of the work done over the past year and for that I would refer you to the annual report of the Secretary-General.

Development of the regulatory framework for exploitation

As everyone knows, the priority work of the Authority at present is the adoption of the draft regulations governing future exploitation of marine mineral resources.

Regardless of positions adopted by individual States Parties and observers regarding any possible future activities in the Area, the adoption of these regulations is timely, necessary, and mandated by the Convention and the 1994 Agreement.

I am highly encouraged therefore by the strong support and enduring commitment expressed by States Parties to the need to work effectively and diligently towards this objective.

In 2022, the Council devoted most of its time to advancing the work on the draft regulations

based on a roadmap adopted at the twenty-sixth session, which was revised and updated at the last part of the twenty-seventh session in November 2022. At the first part of the twenty-eighth session, in March 2023, further significant progress was achieved in each of the informal working groups established by the Council. Furthermore, eleven intersessional working groups were established for delegations to progress their discussions and reach consensus on some key parts of the draft regulations. The Secretariat has started to receive summaries and text proposals by those working groups and these will be further discussed at the next meeting of the Council in July.

I believe the work that has been accomplished so far is highly constructive and is building consensus around many of the critical issues in the draft regulations. I look forward to further progress in July so that the momentum gained so far can be maintained. As always, the Secretariat stands ready to support the negotiations.

Another important area of progress relates to the Enterprise. In March 2023, the Council adopted a decision relating to the establishment of the position of an interim director general of the Enterprise. In that decision, the Council requested me to submit a supplementary budget proposal, which has been done, and which will be considered in few weeks by the Finance Committee.

The Finance Committee will also resume its discussions on the development of rules, regulations, and procedures for the distribution of funds received in accordance with Article 82(4) of the Convention, as well as with its discussion on the possible establishment of a Seabed Sustainability Fund made up of the royalties from future activities in the Area.

I also would like to congratulate the new members of the Legal and Technical Commission comprising now 41 members which held its first meetings in March this year.

Mr. President,

I will move on to discuss some of the other critical issues for the Authority, but before I do so, as is customary at this meeting, a brief word on the financial status of the Authority.

Financial Status

I am pleased to report that as of the end of May 2023, 88 percent of the value of contributions to the 2023 budget due from Member States and the European Union had been received. This leaves 12 percent of assessed contributions outstanding and I urge States concerned to pay their contributions as soon as possible.

Contributions outstanding from member States for prior periods (1998–2022) amounted to \$757,586. This is a low figure by historical standards, and over time, the Authority has a remarkable record of collecting more than 90 percent of contributions due. Nevertheless, it still represents a deficit in cash-flow which impacts the financial statements. Even more important the figure includes 47 States that have been in arrears of contributions for two years or more. Over the past year we have made great efforts to contact these States, which has resulted in the collection of some long-outstanding arrears. Nevertheless, I wish once again to urge all States parties to pay their outstanding contributions without delay.

One point I should mention is that the voluntary trust fund for the participation of developing States members of the Council is completely exhausted. I encourage contributions so that we can have full and meaningful participation in July.

I now move on to comment on some of the other important matters under consideration by the Authority.

Strategic Plan for the period 2024–2028

The adoption of the first strategic plan for the Authority in 2018 was a major milestone in the evolution of the Authority. That strategic plan, covering the period 2019-2023, has served us very well as the foundation for a comprehensive strategic framework for the work of the

Authority. That framework now includes a High-Level Action Plan, an Action Plan for Marine Scientific Research in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science, and a capacity development strategy. Together, these have been highly effective in focusing the Authority's programmatic activities, mobilizing resources and delivering on the manifold mandates of the Authority – beyond its regulatory functions – as envisaged by the Convention.

This year, it is time to renew the strategic plan and you will see that a draft strategic plan for the period 2024-2028 has been released for consultation. This draft will be considered by the Assembly at the twenty-eighth session.

Considering that we are still in the period before seabed mining has taken place (that is, before the approval of the first plan of work for exploitation) the new strategic plan contains no surprises. It remains firmly anchored in the provisions of the Part XI Agreement and emphasizes the need for continuity and consolidation in the delivery of the mandate of the Authority, whilst reflecting some of the important new developments in the field of ocean affairs.

The deadline for submissions on the revised strategic plan is 23 June 2023 and I encourage all of you to look at it. As always, my staff and I remain available for discussion of any concerns you may have. To support the work on the plan, there is also a review report, prepared by an independent consultant, which aims to provide a snapshot impression of the implementation of the first strategic plan.

Programmatic activities

Mr. President, the work and mandate of the Authority extends far beyond the formulation of rules, regulations and procedures to ensure the responsible and sustainable utilization of deep-sea mineral resources as permitted by the Convention.

It includes the custodianship of the space that is designated as the common heritage of humankind, the facilitation of scientific research in respect of the Area, capacity-building, and international cooperation in the governance of marine space. The Authority serves as a

fundamental forum, accessible to all States Parties, for dialogue, negotiation, and consensus-building on matters concerning the sustainable management of deep-sea resources, environmental preservation, and the advancement of scientific knowledge.

I wish to highlight recent developments with respect to just two aspects of this work.

The first is our work relating to capacity development.

In August 2022 the Assembly adopted the first ever capacity development strategy of the Authority. Although capacity-building and training have been an integral feature of the Authority's mandate since its establishment, the adoption of this strategy consolidated the approach taken by the Authority to deliver meaningful and tailored activities to respond to the capacity needs identified by its members. The nomination of National Focal Points for capacity development plays a very important role in that regard, and I want to sincerely thank the 59 member States that have now appointed a focal point to support the Authority in this work. I encourage others to come forward.

A key milestone has been achieved with the establishment by the Assembly of the ISA Partnership Fund as a multi-donor trust fund. The main objective of the fund is to promote and encourage the conduct of marine scientific research in the Area for the benefit of humankind.

Already, contributions to this fund as of June 2023 amount to \$604,644 thanks to contributions received this year from Greece, China, and Mexico. I am pleased to inform you that the Board of the Partnership Fund held its first meeting of the year few weeks ago and allocated a total of \$382,000 to four different projects which will be advertised in the upcoming days.

Second is to share with you some important progress in our commitment to advance women's empowerment and leadership in ocean affairs. I would like to particularly acknowledge Ambassador Tone, Permanent Representative of Tonga, for accepting to co-chair with me the new Impact Group on Research and Oceans for Women (IGROW) established under the International Gender Champions (IGC) network.

I also would like to sincerely thank Ambassador Gafoor from Singapore and Ambassador Frazier from Malta for the support provided to us in organizing here in New York, in September 2022, the first ever Women in the Law of the Sea Conference. The participation of 45 women experts in the law of the sea from all over the world and particularly those from LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS was a testament to the importance of our collective action and the need to do more.

Last week was World Oceans Day. The Authority decided to dedicate our celebration to acknowledging and recognizing the contributions of women scientists in the realm of deep-sea research, recognizing their invaluable role and seeking ways to foster their engagement and progression into leadership positions.

On this occasion, the Authority, together with UN-OHRLLS and the other 20+ partners of the Women in Deep-Sea Research (WIDSR) project launched the See Her Exceed or S.H.E programme – the first ever global mentoring programme for women scientists working deep-sea research from developing States. A call for expressions of interest to enrol in this programme has been issued and I encourage you to share this information broadly with your respective national and regional institutions to enable talented women to break the glass ceiling.

I would like now to offer a few concluding remarks. Before I do so, however, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the successful conclusion of the intergovernmental conference and the imminent adoption of the BBNJ Agreement.

I first wish to add my voice to those who have spoken to welcome this monumental achievement.

In accordance with resolution 72/249 of the United Nations General Assembly, the Authority participated into the fifth and resumed fifth session of the Intergovernmental conference which led to the conclusion of the BBNJ Agreement.

Now is not the time or place to analyse the provisions of the new agreement. There will be time for that in due course. Let me just say that, as recalled in many provisions of the new agreement, coordination, cooperation and complementarity will be pivotal for the sustainable use of ocean

resources. In view of the applicable legal framework under Part XI of UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement, the Authority can effectively contribute to each of the elements constituting the package deal of the BBNJ Agreement. In keeping up with its mandate under the Convention and the 1994 Agreement, and in the spirit of contribution to the consistent application of all the legal instruments under the Convention, I expect that the future work of the Authority will be oriented towards the achievement of the commonly shared objectives of the new agreement. The Authority stands ready to work with all relevant stakeholders to implement the ambitious goals set out by the agreement.

Final remarks,

This year again, I would like to underline the paramount significance of the Convention and its institutions in ensuring international cooperation, peace, security, and a legal framework for the seas and oceans. This robust framework, grounded in international law, promotes the equitable utilization of resources, protection of the marine environment, and preservation of the global order. In fact it is the main safeguard for collective and peaceful management of shared resources in a sustainable manner. Every time it is challenged, it is the entire system that is weakened and undermined.

For almost 30 years the Authority has been instrumental to the success of the Convention. Its mandate incorporates the organization, regulation, and control of all activities associated with mineral resources within the international seabed area. This responsibility is undertaken for the collective benefit of humanity. Concurrently, the Authority bears the solemn duty of ensuring the effective safeguarding of the marine environment against any potential detrimental impacts arising from activities in the Area. Additionally, the Authority assumes exclusive accountability for promoting and fostering marine scientific research within the Area, ensuring that knowledge is available to all, regardless of the state of development.

One core principle underpins the regime. It is that every State Party, regardless of whether coastal or landlocked, is entitled to carry out activities within the Area as long as it does so in accordance with the rules, regulations, and procedures of the Authority. The fact, therefore, that

there have been no unilateral claims to seabed resources, and that no activities of exploration or exploitation have taken place in the Area except as fully regulated by the Authority, is evidence of the tremendous success of this regime so far.

I would like to end by expressing my appreciation for their active participation in the discussions in the Council and Assembly and for the strong commitment they have shown to finding consensus on all matters. I hope that will continue in the future.

Thank you.