

Mr President, Mr Secretary-General, Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

Portugal thanks the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report, providing this Assembly with an informative overview of ISA's many activities during the past year. By doing so, the report further illustrates the Authority's multiple mandate, as well as its endeavor to deliver on its different components pertaining to the implementation of UNCLOS and to the advancement of the Oceans and Law of Sea agenda.

The Authority is at a critical juncture. Its mandate to manage marine mineral resources for the benefit of all humankind has garnered growing concern and scrutiny, particularly over its obligation to ensure effective protection for the marine environment from harmful effects which may arise from mining the Area. The world is more attentive than ever to the multiple mandate of ISA and to the challenges of its balanced execution.

Mr. President,

During the Council's debate on the so-called "two-year rule", Portugal recalled its commitment towards the completion of robust, environmentally-sound Rules, Regulations and Procedures (RRPs) relating to exploitation in a timely manner. Accordingly, we welcome the adoption, by consensus, of a new roadmap that will guide our work during the third Part of the current session and during the twenty-ninth and thirtieth sessions of the Council. That said, we wish to stress that what the Council has now adopted amounts to a framework which provides predictability to our planning and helps structure our deliberations, rather than sets a hard deadline that binds us to the adoption of the RRP's irrespective of their maturity and readiness.

Moreover, it should be beyond doubt that such timeline is not established at the cost of what should be our collective priority: to develop robust RRP's, containing ambitious environmental standards and thresholds, as well as mechanisms for the assessment of a plan of work and decision-making based on the best available scientific information, the ecosystem approach and the precautionary principle. Let us be clear. The elaboration of the RRP's can only be considered complete **if and when** they incorporate these elements

and, by doing so, provide for a solid legal framework that ensures the protection of the marine environment against harmful effects arising from seabed mining.

**To develop such a framework, we need time.**

The first draft of the exploitation regulations was submitted to the Council in 2019 but its consideration was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While negotiations have since resumed at good pace, the work is not yet completed, and we note, with concern, that some important elements of the legal framework such as standards and guidelines, the environmental thresholds and the regional environmental management plans, are yet to be developed.

As stated earlier, we reiterate that **without the conclusion of the mining code, commercial exploitation should not and cannot take place.**

Mr. President,

The regulatory framework for activities in the Area must include the most ambitious environmental standards and criteria, as well as reliance on the best available scientific information to measure the impacts of seabed mining on the marine environment, to allow for informed decision-making in the future.

Therefore, Portugal strongly supports ISA's Marine Scientific Research Action Plan and the development of Strategic Alliances and Partnerships for Science and Knowledge. In this regard, we would like to highlight project Trident, financed by the European Union and coordinated by Portugal, that aims to develop a remote and automated monitoring system for deep seabed activities which will support the development of reliable and cost-effective systems for the prediction and continuous environmental impact monitoring of such activities in the Area.

Marine environment protection is a priority for Portugal and, accordingly, we consider it to be of the utmost importance to devote further work, resources and research into the science and technology that enables adequate and effective monitoring of activities. This is why we are pleased to have answered the call to collaborate with the Authority in the development of the technology roadmap in the key area of monitoring environmental impact assessment.

We also welcome ISA Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative, aimed at enhancing our understanding of the seabed and its ecosystems and the impact of mining activities in the marine environment.

Mr. President

Portugal strongly supports the Authority's efforts to promote the role of women scientists and we firmly encourage the continuation of such efforts to ensure equal opportunities for women in all aspects of seabed-related research and decision-making processes.

We note with appreciation ISA's multiple capacity building initiatives and partnerships providing opportunities to expand participation in activities in the Area. We specifically note the important role of National Focal Points and commend the recently launched DEEP DIVE, a learning platform to which Portugal is contributing.

Mr. President,

This year is also marked by the adoption of the agreement under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, including the Area. We urge the Authority to develop a close collaboration with the BBNJ agreement in order to establish a coherent regime for the Area.

Before concluding, Mr President, we would also like to note with appreciation the Secretariat's efforts to improve the organizational performance of ISA, as well as the commitment to transparency. Portugal thanks the Secretariat for the support of the work of the Authority and for the assistance provided to member States.

I thank you, Mr. President.