



**78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly
Agenda Item 75 (a) Oceans and the Law of the Sea**

UNHQ, New York, USA

5 December 2023

STATEMENT

by

H.E. Mr. Michael W. Lodge

Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

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Mr. President,

Thank you for the opportunity to make this statement on behalf of the International Seabed Authority.

I wish to commend the General Assembly on the two draft resolutions before it today and to acknowledge the references in draft resolution 78/L.15 to the work of the Authority. At the same time, I note that the resolution could probably do with some further updating as several of the references to the Authority seem to be quite out of date and even redundant. I hope this will be considered as part of the commendable efforts to streamline the resolution in future.

I also wish to take this opportunity to commend the Assembly on the adoption by the intergovernmental conference of the new international instrument under the Convention. It is encouraging that the provisions of the agreement fully reflect the specific mandate and competences of the Authority and I reiterate once again the willingness of the Authority to support States Parties in the implementation of the new agreement.

I welcome Rwanda as the 169th member of the Authority.

Mr. President,

As seabed activities progress, the Authority continues to apply strictly the evolutionary approach and the precautionary approach to the development of activities in the Area as stipulated in the 1994 Agreement.

That Agreement was fundamental to the entry into force of the Convention and lies at the heart of the global governance regime for the ocean.

At its core, the 1994 Agreement provides for a balance between the interests of all States Parties. On the one hand, it protects the interests of States Parties wishing to pursue activities in the Area, by allowing activities to proceed in a precautionary manner, under the supervision of the Authority, and with a view to eventual development of the resources of the Area. On the other hand, it commits States Parties to advance the regulatory regime for the Area as activities in the Area progress.

It is in pursuance of this balanced and evolutionary approach that the Council of the Authority continues to advance its work on the draft regulations for exploitation of marine minerals in the Area, including through the adoption of a road map to guide its further work during 2024 with a view to adopting the regulations during the thirtieth session of the Authority. Last month, the Council further decided to continue its work on the basis of a consolidated negotiating text, to be issued early in 2024.

These decisions are a clear expression of the commitment shared by the majority of States Parties to work together decisively, constructively and in good faith to ensure that a sound regulatory framework is in place prior to the commencement of exploitation.

The adoption of the regulations is also the best guarantee that activities in the Area will be carried out in compliance with a comprehensive global framework geared towards averting serious harm to the marine environment, while upholding the rights of all States Parties to conduct activities in the Area for the benefit of humanity.

Mr. President,

We need to be aware that the agreements reached in 1994 were complex, nuanced and required difficult compromises to be made on all sides. The 1994 Agreement successfully avoided an extreme polarization of positions and allowed all States Parties to work together to a common objective within the framework of the Convention.

It is a matter of great concern therefore that today we see emerging once again that same polarization of positions. This is reflected in political positions taken by some States Parties that appear to run contrary to the Convention and the 1994 Agreement. It is also reflected in an increasing tendency for other international processes, and even other organizations within the United Nations system, to ignore or undermine the competences recognized to the institutions established by the Convention.

These developments should be of the greatest concern to all States Parties and to this Assembly.

The Convention and its implementing agreements are the foundation for the global system of ocean governance. They have ensured peace and security in the ocean for 40 years by respecting a delicate balance between the rights and interests of all. Together they are a package. Collectively, we cannot pick and choose which elements of the package should be privileged above others. If one part of the compromise is undermined for political convenience, we cannot expect that the rest will be respected.

I urge States Parties to be vigilant and I wish to express my gratitude to all States Parties that remain committed to the work and mandate of the Authority and continue to support its central role in the overall governance system established by the Convention.

Mr. President,

In conclusion I wish to take the opportunity to remind the Assembly that 2024 will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention and the 1994 Agreement and the establishment of the Authority.

As well as being a significant milestone for the Authority, I believe this presents an ideal opportunity to showcase the many positive achievements of the past 30 years, including the many achievements in capacity development and benefit sharing that, for reasons of space, are not reflected in the draft resolution.

We should, for example, celebrate the fact that today we know more about the ocean than at any time in human history. Thanks to technology and innovation, we are learning more with each exploration cruise and we have the capacity to store, analyze and share more scientific data than ever before.

We should also celebrate the fact that the Authority has been able to establish and manage effectively the largest marine protected area beyond national jurisdictions, covering 1.9 million square kilometers of the sea floor of the central Pacific Ocean.

We are also proud to lead unique programmes to advance women's empowerment and leadership in ocean affairs in particular for women scientists from least developed States, landlocked developing States and small island developing States.

Since 1994, the Authority has also been able to offer world-class training and capacity development opportunities to more than 1,000 individuals from developing States.

Through its marine scientific research action plan, which is the global agenda for deep sea scientific research, the Authority is making it possible to envisage a world in which we can responsibly manage and use sustainably the riches of the deep ocean in line with the precautionary approach.

Above all, the painstaking, deliberate and dedicated work by the members of the Authority and the generations of visionaries who came before us, have made it possible to realize the dream of the founders of the Convention that the deep seabed could be managed sustainably through a single global regime, founded on principles of equity, for the benefit of all humanity.

I thank you Mr. President.
