

International Seabed Authority

Press Release



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COMMERCIALIZATION OF MARINE MINERALS IN DEEP SEABED WELL WITHIN REACH, INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY SECRETARY- GENERAL STATES AS HE INTRODUCES ANNUAL REPORT

Commercialization of marine minerals in areas beyond national jurisdictions were well within reach and could be attained in the foreseeable future, the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority, Nii Allotey Odunton (Ghana), said at the twenty-second session of the Authority in Kingston this morning.

Introducing his annual report to the Assembly of the Authority, Mr. Odunton said the Authority was embarking on the road to commercialization of marine minerals and though there were still major obstacles to be overcome, the goals “are well within reach and are attainable in the foreseeable future”.

One of the challenges was proving that deep-seabed mining was feasible, and could be achieved in an environmentally sustainable manner; another challenge was the adoption of an exploitation code that was transparent and flexible enough to allow for adjustments to its environmental provisions for new information and advances in technology to be incorporated into it.

Article 166, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea requires the Secretary-General to report annually to members of the Authority on the work of the Authority. Details of the report are contained in document ISBA/22/A/2 and is available at the Authority’s website.

The Secretary-General announced that the membership of the Authority had risen to 168 with the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea by Azerbaijan on 16 June 2016. He urged the 19 members who had signed the Convention but were yet to become party to the 1994 Agreement relating to the Implementation of Article XI annexed to the Convention to do so.

On the status of members' contributions, the Secretary-General reported that as at 18 July 2016, 44 members of the Authority were in arrears for two years or more. He urged these members to settle their arrears promptly.

He thanked members who had made contributions to the funds of the Authority: the governments of Argentina and the People's Republic of China contributed \$10,000 and \$40,000 respectively to the Voluntary Trust Fund. Since the last session, he said, the Institut Francais de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (IFREMER) had contributed \$2,777 and Mexico \$7,500 to the Endowment Fund for marine scientific research in the Area.

The Secretary-General highlighted that the agreement for cooperation between the IMO and the Authority was signed by the IMO Secretary-General on 8 December 2015 and by him on 8 March 2016.

With regard to the status of exploration and exploitation in the Area, the Secretary-General reported that as at 31 May 2016, 24 contracts for exploration had entered into force (15 for polymetallic nodules, 5 for polymetallic sulphides and 4 for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts).

Since the twenty-first session, three new contracts had been signed, he said. On 9 November 2015, a contract for exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts with the Companhia de Pesquisa de Recursos Minerais was signed in Brasilia and on 29 March 2016, a second contract for exploration for polymetallic nodules was signed in New York with UK Seabed Resources Ltd. A contract for exploration for polymetallic nodules with the Cook Islands Investment Corporation was signed during this session. It is anticipated that pending contracts with India and with the China Minmetals Corporation will be signed during 2016.

The Secretary-General announced that the Authority had conducted a workshop for the standardization of the procedures and methodologies for taxonomic classification of the fauna in the Area. It was convened at the Marine Biology Research Group, Ghent University, in Ghent, Belgium, from 14 to 17 December 2015, and was co-hosted by Ghent University and Global Sea Mineral Resources.

Discussion

Jamaica's minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Senator the Honourable Kamina Johnson Smith, speaking on behalf of the Jamaican delegation, welcomed all members of the Authority to her country. She commended the Secretary-General and the secretariat staff, as well as the Assembly president and his predecessor for their work.

The minister noted that her government had taken some steps to improve the working environment at the Authority's headquarters, while acknowledging that there was more to be done. She expressed pleasure that "our sister Caribbean State, Antigua and Barbuda" had recently ratified the Convention, and called attention to the importance of ratifying the protocol as ratification "increases the strength of our Authority."

As a committed State party and a small island state, Jamaica was committed to the preservation of the marine environment, she said, adding that her country was fully aware that the health of the deep seas was critical for the health of humankind.

The minister was heartened to note that the Legal and Technical Commission had developed guidelines for contractors which would no doubt allow for a standard reporting methodology and easier monitoring of their contracts.

Minister Johnson Smith thanked those members who had made contributions to the Endowment Fund and Voluntary Trust Fund. She acknowledged the Authority's efforts to develop the capacity of the Satya N.Nandan Library and encouraged members to make donations to the collection.

In closing, the minister reaffirmed the commitment of the government and people of Jamaica to the International Seabed Authority.

Japan pledged to continue its constructive engagement in the work of the Authority to adopt a sensible regulation of mineral exploitation, with good balance of considerations for exploitation and the environment. On the Authority's work towards adoption of the exploitation code Japan said it would also continue its constructive engagement in the work of the Authority. The delegation took the opportunity to encourage the State Parties concerned to fulfill their obligations to duly make their financial contributions.

Australia, speaking on behalf of the CANZ group (Canada, Australia and New Zealand) said exploitation regulations must be in place soon, so that activities in the Area could proceed on an equal footing, and guided by clear parameters. Those regulations, CANZ said, must be underpinned by commercial principles to promote investment on a level playing field, and incorporate best practice environmental management. The regulations should draw on existing knowledge and best practice – and they must also be able to respond and adapt as the activities changed and as more information came to light about ongoing activities, the group said.

South Africa expressed its appreciation for the contributions made by members to the funds of the Authority, and for the increase in training opportunities from which developing states could benefit, recalling the commitment of Ambassador Arvid Pardo of Malta to the principle of sharing the oceans' wealth for all.

Monaco said that the 22nd session of the Authority had emerged against the background of the first meeting of the preparatory committee on the elaboration of an international legal instrument on the conservation and sustainability of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction. The representative encouraged the Authority to play an active role in that process. He applauded the agreement of cooperation with the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO).

United Kingdom affirmed that real progress had been made by the Authority during the past year and welcomed the collaboration with international organizations such as the IHO. His

delegation looked forward to contributing to the work on the draft exploitation regulations which was of the highest priority to the Authority.

Singapore commended the Secretary-General for maintaining the momentum of work towards the development of exploitation regulations. She also reiterated the need for the creation of a “fit for purpose” data management strategy for the Authority. The speaker supported the staging of workshops and sensitization seminars and welcomed the possibility of the contractors offering up to 200 training opportunities over the next five years.

Cameroon said the growing interest by contractors, as evidenced by their increasing numbers, should motivate all members. He stressed the importance of a regulatory framework as a definite step towards the goal of sharing the common heritage of mankind with all nations. India also welcomed the increase in the number of contractors and the efforts of the Authority in conducting sensitization seminars. Cuba reiterated the need to maintain focus on the preservation and protection of the marine environment.

Bangladesh said it would support the setting up of an independent inspectorate in order to discharge the Authority’s regulatory mandate with the onset of exploitation activities. “We look forward to discussing this further in the context of the Article 154 Review”, the delegation said. Bangladesh welcomed the decision taken by the Authority to enhance transparency and accountability by contractors in relation to their applications for further extension of exploration contracts. This would allow the membership to gain further confidence in the contractors’ work, create room for the Legal and Technical Commission (LTC) to share information with the wider membership while maintaining the confidentiality requirements, and enable the contractors to share their respective challenges going forward.

France welcomed the new format for the presentation of the budget of the Authority in two parts covering administrative and programme costs. The speaker said it afforded a clearer strategic vision of the work of the Authority and enhanced transparency with regard to the financial governance of the organization.

Algeria welcomed the role played by the Authority in bolstering its relationship with other organisations whose work impacted the environment. While it praised the Authority’s online presence through its well organized website the delegation said a version of the site in Arabic would support linguistic diversity.

Ghana said it appreciated the activities of the Authority and contractors in the area of capacity building. This effort, the delegation said, made it possible for several trainees, particularly from developing countries, to benefit from training in areas such as deep seabed mining. Ghana also welcomed the workshops on taxonomic method and standardization of microfauna in the Clarion Clipperton Zone, the objective of which, it said, was to arrive at a standard format for identifying, sampling and storing methods.

The Assembly will continue the discussion on the report of Secretary-General at its next meeting tomorrow morning, 20 July.

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