

Sri Lanka Intervention
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Madam President,

Firstly, on behalf of my delegation I would like to **congratulate you - Senator Kamina Johnson-Smith - on *your* election and we are honored that you are at the helm during this historic year for the ISA.** Let me also express our gratitude to Mr. Mariusz- Orion Jedlysek of Poland for presiding over the Assembly during its 24th Session and steering it so expertly towards this milestone year. Sri Lanka welcomes the election of the distinguished representatives of Ghana, Nauru, Poland and Norway as vice presidents and also congratulates the distinguished appointed members of the credentials committee. **Sri Lanka stands ready to support you and your bureau in your important work as you guide us through this 25th Session of the Assembly. We thank the Secretary General for his Annual Report and his useful presentation on the work of the Authority this morning. We thank the Secretariat for its efforts in supporting the work of the International Seabed Authority.**

Madam President, **I have been fortunate to travel in Jamaica over this weekend and I stand in awe of its beauty and tranquility. It reminds me of my home Sri Lanka. We wish to thank the government and people of Jamaica for their gracious hospitality in having us here.**

Madam President.

Today, we see a world order that is becoming more unpredictable and polarized. We find that multilateral frameworks are increasingly coming under pressure. Therefore, for small countries like ours such historic treaties as UNCLOS and its unified and universal character, allows us a voice in how the global maritime order is shaped.

Last week we commemorated Nelson Mandela International Day. We remember with humility and admiration the extraordinarily inspiring life of South Africa's great son. As we continue our work, especially in finalizing the exploitation Regulations, we must be reminded of Madiba's own words when he reflected on his surroundings and charged us all, and I quote, 'we must never forget that it is *our* duty to protect this environment'.

Madam President,

As a coastal state particularly vulnerable to the impact of ocean environments, with our coastal communities surviving at ocean level, and our economy and trade tied to the oceans and climate change, Sri Lanka would like to make the following points:

Firstly, Due to the fact that scientific knowledge is still so weak regarding the seabed ecosystem, Marine Scientific Research (MSR) is an important tool that should inform the development of ISA Regulations.

Sri Lanka gave careful ear to the interventions made during the Council Sessions this past week, and we agree that more attention and detail is

necessary in the Regulations pertaining to the Protection of the Environment. In this regard we also thank Council President from South Africa for her Report on the Council Sessions yesterday.

Madam President,

We must view the Regulations in the spirit in which they are being negotiated, as a document grounded in the Common Heritage of Mankind principle and established for the benefit of *all* mankind.

Secondly, while it may be useful to have an aspirational self-imposed deadline of 2020 to finalize the Regulations, nonetheless, we need to ensure that the views of all stakeholders are taken into account. Next year will be a historic in many respects. The 2020 Oceans Conference will be held in June in Lisbon, and the UN will be celebrating its 75th anniversary with events planned throughout the year in New York.

We need to be mindful that not all countries have the adequate resources. It is essential to enable informed participation from all member states, and to avoid an ISA regime that is influenced and pushed through by the few.

While we do not believe that negotiations should be open-ended, they should not be rushed. We are of the view that in terms of process they should be equitable, and that in terms of substance, once adopted, they should continue to be responsive to new data. Quality should not be sacrificed at the altar of deadlines.

It is worth mentioning that UNCLOS - *known* as the Constitution of the Seas – which was successful in the codification of the main issues pertaining to the Law of the Sea, was negotiated over a long period of time.

Thirdly, Sri Lanka is a wide-margin-state with much of our territory being in deep ocean. Therefore, capacity in the understanding and management of this environment is of great importance, and the capacity development programmes of the ISA are of interest and relevance to Sri Lanka – particularly those on MSR and technical capacity-building programmes for professionals of developing countries.

Developing countries are at the same time the most reliant on the oceans and the most vulnerable to ocean-related disasters. They are often the first responders to such disasters and serve as guardians of a significant proportion of coastal and marine environments. It is important therefore to work at community, national and regional levels to enhance awareness and capacity regarding marine issues.

It is important to explore and promote possibilities for funding delegations from developing countries to ISA meetings, workshops and other events to ensure that all countries can be properly and adequately represented in an equitable manner.

We are happy in this regard to note in the Report that one of Sri Lanka's young scientists, has been chosen to receive training under a two-year project on MSR, through the endowment fund.

Fourthly, as a coastal state and a developing state, we are naturally concerned with our rights and legitimate interests with regard to activities in the ‘Area’.

With regard to the ‘Area’ Madam President, Sri Lanka’s submission is currently appearing before the CLCS. The Continental shelf of each country is unique to its geological surroundings, and warrants careful consideration by the CLCS including special methods as designated under the terms of UNCLOS for the southern part of the Bay of Bengal – applying to Sri Lanka, in order to reach just and equitable outcomes in relation to the determination of the outer limits.

We look forward to depositing with the ISA our charts and lists of coordinates as soon as possible after the establishment of our outer limit lines.

Fifthly, we welcome the reference in the Secretary General’s Report to the possible vulnerabilities of undersea data cables. We support efforts in order to give meaning to the **“reasonable regard”** obligations under UNCLOS and to ensure effective protection of submarine cables.

Madam President,

It is also important to note the emergence of organizations, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) formed to ensure greater cooperation among States inter alia in harnessing ocean resources in the Indian Ocean region. Therefore we welcome the exchange of views that took place between the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the ISA resulting in the preparation of an MoU to encourage collaboration and cooperation in areas

of mutual interest such as joint capacity- building programmes, the sharing of information related to seabed activities, and the promotion and encouragement of marine scientific research.

In conclusion Madam President, I come from a culture and a country where our philosophic heritage has respected the sanctity of the environment and sees all living things as equal in nature. The Lord Buddha, taught people to preserve the environment for future generations, and for prosperity. But the separation of human beings from their natural habitat due to modernization and excessive materialism has weakened that message, which once fortified our ancestors.

All of us Madam President, are inextricably bound together in humanity through our oceans. As member states, we have common but differentiated responsibilities to preserve our oceans for future generations. The Convention places a responsibility on states to take individually or jointly as appropriate, all measures necessary to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the marine environment from any source, in accordance with their capabilities, and to harmonize domestic policies in this connection.

Therefore, in this milestone year for the ISA, let us pledge to make the protection of the environment, the cornerstone of our deliberations.

I thank you