

Statement
Special Commemorative Session of the Assembly of the
International Seabed Authority celebrating the 25th
Anniversary of the Authority

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Madam President, the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jamaica,
The Most Honourable Prime Minister of Jamaica,
The Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you today to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the establishment of the International Seabed Authority. This is a milestone moment and testimony to collective and multilateral cooperation.

Madam President,

Your assumption of the Presidency of the 25th Session of the International Seabed Authority reflects the gravity that your Government, Jamaica, attaches to the work of this organization. As the Host Country, Jamaica's contribution to the evolution of the Authority and to the accomplishments of its mandates, cannot be overemphasized. We acknowledge, with gratitude, Jamaica's support, and congratulate the people and the Government of this beautiful land.

Let me also extend my sincere thanks to the Most Honourable Prime Minister of Jamaica for his personal dedication and support to the Authority.

Madam President,

Almost 37 years ago, the signing of the 1982 UNCLOS in Montego Bay, created history for the International Community in both the conservation and utilization of the oceans and seas.

The 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development Report, entitled: "Our Common Future" – which initiated the current sustainable development discourse – mentioned "seabed mining in the Area".

But, not until the International Seabed Authority was established 25 years ago, the generic idea of 'sustainable development' – in contrast to the notion of sustainable utilization of natural resources – has generally been restricted to areas within a State's territory or jurisdiction.

Today, the governance of the Area, as we have observed over the last 25 years, is beginning to be understood by reference to sustainable development.

The developmental role of the International Seabed Authority to contribute to socio-economic development, within environmental limits, is gathering momentum. This is not a new phenomenon at all. It is an agreed idea as old as UNCLOS itself. The declaration by United Nations Member States that the Area – which represents over 45 per cent of the planet's surface and its resources – are, I quote, “common heritage of mankind”, unquote, was a milestone in the realm of international cooperation.

Madam President,

As we celebrate 25 years of the Authority's existence, its member States must be commended for their contribution to multilateralism. Article 157(3) of UNCLOS is clear: the Authority is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members. Their observance of this principle has enabled some of the world's smallest and most vulnerable countries to become Sponsoring States, thus contributing to the participation of developing countries.

The leadership of all the organs of the Authority must also be commended. These include current and former presidents of the Assembly and of the Council; current and former chairpersons of the Commission and the Committee; and needless to say, the three Secretaries-General so far, who have helped to manage the Authority.

I was informed that Ambassador Satya Nandan, the first Secretary-General of the Authority, could not make it to this celebration because of his health, unfortunately. His historical contributions to the Authority will be acknowledged and remembered forever. I am glad to see my good friends, Mr. Ni-Odunton is here, and of course, Mr. Michael Lodge. Thank you all for your role in the nurturing of the Authority. It has now become a vibrant organization, adequately equipped to take us through the next decade of evolutionary development.

Madam President, and Dear colleagues,

The 25th anniversary of the Authority is also a memorable moment for me personally. I was very proud to work with you all in both the Council and the Assembly of the Authority from 1998 to 2005, in my capacity as the Head of the Chinese Delegation. I was particularly proud that I participated in the whole process of formulation of the first mining code, that is the regulations on prospection and exploration for polymetallic nodules in the Area.

Madam President,

Today, as United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, and the Secretary-General designated for the 2020 United Nations Ocean Conference, I take this opportunity to reiterate the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for delivering on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The overarching theme of the 2020 Ocean Conference, as decided by the United Nations General Assembly, is: “Scaling up ocean action based on science and innovation for the implementation

of Goal 14: stocktaking, partnerships and solutions”. As part of this scaling up effort, I note that the Authority is currently implementing seven Voluntary Commitments from the 2017 Ocean Conference. One of these – the “Abyssal Initiative for Blue Growth” – is being jointly implemented with UN-DESA. I look forward to the important contribution by the Authority to the 2020 Ocean Conference.

Distinguished delegates,

As we look ahead to next 25 years, and more immediately to 2020 United Nations Ocean Conference, let us re-commit ourselves to the principle of precautionary approach. Such an approach will:

- facilitate innovation;
- encourage scientific research;
- ratchet up important action to deliver on SDG 14 on oceans; and
- help ensure a sustainable development path for our shared future.

I wish a bright future for the International Seabed Authority!

Happy 25th Anniversary of the Authority!

I thank you.