Twenty-fifth Annual Session of the International Seabed Authority (Second Part):
Tuesday, 23 July 2019

On Tuesday, the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority (ISA) discussed the annual report of the Secretary-General, which outlines the Authority’s activities from July 2018 to June 2019.

Report of the Secretary General

Secretary-General Michael Lodge presented his annual report (ISBA/25/A/2). The Assembly was also invited to consider a submission by the African Group on the training programme for developing countries (ISBA/25/A/8).

Secretary-General Lodge, *inter alia*:

- encouraged members of the Authority that have not done so to deposit charts and lists for the delineations of the limits for national jurisdictions, and accede to the Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the ISA;
- urged member states to pay their arrears, providing an overview of the financial status of the Authority’s funds;
- noted progress on the new ISA website;
- highlighted workshops organized to facilitate the development and review of regional environmental management plans (REMPs);
- emphasized the completion of the data management system;
- highlighted the training and internship programmes of the Authority;
- stressed the implementation of the Authority’s voluntary commitments registered at the UN Ocean Conference to support the implementation of SDG14 (life below water);
- underlined the organization of various workshops to advance the Authority’s priorities;
- highlighted relationships with many relevant, international organizations; and
- drew attention to the Authority’s participation in global and regional conferences, including in the biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) process.

Many commended Secretary-General Lodge and the Secretariat on a comprehensive report, and lauded the Authority for achieving gender parity in its Secretariat structure. CANADA, AUSTRALIA, and NEW ZEALAND, *inter alia*: acknowledged the importance of the draft exploitation regulations balancing sound commercial principles with best environment practices, supported by the FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA (FSM); and reiterated the need for detailed information for environmental impact statements.

On the draft exploitation regulations, FSM, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, and others reiterated that quality should be prioritized over self-imposed arbitrary deadlines. NIGERIA stated that the draft exploitation regulations should safeguard the sustainability and health of the ocean. VIET NAM emphasized that prospecting and exploration activities must ensure the successful implementation of SDG14.

JAMAICA and the AFRICAN GROUP highlighted the establishment of the host country committee. CANADA, AUSTRALIA, and NEW ZEALAND emphasized the need for a fair payment system and underscored the need for regulatory functions to ensure compliance. TONGA stressed the need to ensure that the regulatory framework is robust for present and future generations. CAMEROON noted the need to consider the effect of deep sea mining on terrestrial mines, with DEEP SEA CONSERVATION COALITION (DSCC), and emphasized the environmental and cultural values of the marine environment in addition to its economic valuation. The PACIFIC COMMUNITY stressed the need for the draft exploitation regulations to address the impacts of seabed activities to fisheries.

ROMANIA urged member states to accede to the Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the Authority. The PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM highlighted the importance of the notion of “reasonable regard” and the need to ensure that regulations, standards, and guidelines are of high quality to safeguard other uses of the ocean. DSCC and GREENPEACE emphasized that deep-sea mining is not an ideal, low-carbon solution. GREENPEACE further called for tackling inefficient use of resources and overconsumption, and for a moratorium on deep seabed mining.

Training programmes and capacity building: JAMAICA and others stressed that capacity building lies at the core of developing countries’ ability to take part in the Authority’s activities and fulfill their obligations under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). THE AFRICAN GROUP, supported by the PHILIPPINES and others, pointed to its submission on training programmes, inviting the Assembly to take note of its recommendations. JAPAN, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, and others outlined national efforts on training programmes. TOGO lauded the Authority for the launch of the Africa Deep-seabed Resources Project. SRI LANKA, INDIA, and TONGA supported the Authority’s capacity development programmes on marine scientific research (MSR) as well as technical capacity-building programmes for professionals. MYANMAR called for the results of MSR to be published on the ISA website. THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA proposed a systematic evaluation of the contractors training programmes. The DEEP OCEAN STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE (DOSI) suggested improving the geographical diversity regarding internship opportunities.

Funds: Many thanked donors for their contributions, urging additional ones from those in a position to do so and the payment of arrears. JAMAICA, the AFRICAN GROUP, and others expressed concern regarding arrears and their impact on the balance of the Working Capital Fund. CHINA outlined national financial contributions to the Authority’s work. MONACO noted his country’s willingness to support the Secretary-General’s Award for Excellence in Deep Sea Research.
THE GAMBIA requested the Secretariat to be more innovative in securing funding for the Voluntary Trust Fund to support participation of developing countries’ members. MYANMAR and the CENTER FOR POLAR AND DEEP OCEAN DEVELOPMENT appreciated the Endowment Fund’s support for trainees on MSR in the Area.

Regional and international conferences: JAMAICA, the AFRICAN GROUP, TONGA, the PHILIPPINES, DSCC, and others emphasized the Authority’s participation in a series of regional and international conferences, highlighting the BBNJ process. JAPAN invited the Authority to participate in the seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development in August 2019, in Japan.

Partnerships and workshops: JAMAICA commended the Authority on its work on all voluntary commitments made at the UN Ocean Conference. The AFRICAN GROUP highlighted the Authority’s partnership with the African Minerals Development Centre, and, with many others, the Pretoria Workshop on Standards and Guidelines. SRI LANKA welcomed the partnership between the Authority and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. BRAZIL lauded the Authority’s partnerships with the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and the World Maritime University. CHILE called on the Secretariat to liaise with the Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP) on work related to marine pollution.

REMPs: While supportive of the growing number of REMP workshops, CHINA opined that how these REMP workshops are dealt with in relation to exploitation remains a question for the Authority. SINGAPORE, ITALY, the PHILIPPINES, and COSTA RICA welcomed the development of REMP workshops, with COSTA RICA and others noting they must be in place before mining activities commence. NAURU and ITALY recommended more regional workshops on REMP workshops. CHILE proposed including experts from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in REMP workshops. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION invited participants to a workshop on REMP workshops, to be held in the Russian Federation in June 2020, and INDIA announced their intention to host a workshop on Indian Ocean REMP workshops.

Transparency: JAMAICA and DSCC stressed that livestreaming ISA’s deliberations makes them open and accessible. JAMAICA, NIGERIA, ITALY, the PHILIPPINES, and others highlighted the launch of the database management system, noting that it will promote transparency and visibility. The AFRICAN GROUP noted that member states should be involved in consultations on contracts, especially on the template on public disclosures, to increase transparency. FSM called for the participation of indigenous peoples and local communities with relevant traditional knowledge.

In the Breezeways

On Tuesday morning, Stephen Vasciannie, President, University of Technology, Jamaica, gave an inaugural lecture on the role of the Montego Bay Convention (UNCLOS) and the ISA in contributing to the rule of law. He provided historical context to illustrate how the Montego Bay Convention aligns with the main elements of international law, but actually sharing resources is a “political question.” He expressed reservation that UNCLOS Article 82 (payments and contributions with respect to the exploitation of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles) is customary international law in regards to its limited practice.

Inagural Biennial Lecture

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