



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

**Fourth Session of the Preparatory Committee established by General
Assembly resolution 69/292: Development of an international legally binding
instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the
conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas
beyond national jurisdiction**

Opening remarks

by

Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares

Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs
and United Nations Legal Counsel

10 July 2017, 10:00am

(Conference Room 2)

Distinguished Chair,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would first like to warmly welcome you to the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee established by General Assembly resolution 69/292: Development of an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

As I am sure all of you are aware, this fourth session of the Preparatory Committee is very important given that the General Assembly, in its resolution



69/292, mandated this Committee to report to it, before the end of 2017, on its progress.

Distinguished delegates,

I am conscious of the workload that is in front of you this week. My remarks will therefore be brief. I will focus on two important developments of relevance to the work of the Preparatory Committee that took place since its third session.

As you are aware, the eighteenth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea convened in accordance with General Assembly resolution 71/257 took place at United Nations Headquarters from 15 to 19 May. This meeting focused its discussions on a critical theme namely, “The effects of climate change on oceans”. In his report prepared to facilitate the discussions of the Informal Consultative Process on the subject, the Secretary-General notes, in particular, that urgently required action includes strengthening strategies to enhance the adaptation and resilience of both ecosystems and societies in order to address the current and future unavoidable effects of climate change. At the meeting, delegations acknowledged that anthropogenic climate change was affecting the oceans with environmental, social and economic impacts for all States and in particular developing countries, especially Least Developed Countries, Land-locked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, as well as coastal African States. They underscored that oceans absorbed more than 90 per cent of the excess heat generated by increases in atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions, causing ocean warming and substantially affecting marine species as well as ecosystems and biodiversity. Delegations therefore underlined the imperative of immediate action to address such impacts and the need for continued coordinated international focus, in particular in view of the grave implications for countries with low-lying coasts, whose very existence is under threat.

Distinguished delegates,

The other important development of note since the third session of this Preparatory Committee, relates to the convening of the United Nations Conference to Support



the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, or Ocean Conference. This Conference was held from 5-9 June 2017 at United Nations Headquarters in New York, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 70/226 and 70/303.

As those of you who also participated in that successful Conference would be keenly aware of, the attention being paid to ocean-related matters, including this process continues to grow. It is thus not surprising that the declaration entitled “Our ocean, our future: call for action” adopted by the Conference and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 71/312, refers to the important work of this Committee. In the declaration, all stakeholders are called on to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development by taking, inter alia, multiple actions on an urgent basis. This includes actively engaging in discussions and the exchange of views in this Preparatory Committee, so that the General Assembly can, before the end of its seventy-second session, taking into account the report of this Committee to the General Assembly, decide on the convening and on the starting date of an intergovernmental conference.

Distinguished delegates,

Clearly, your work over the next two weeks will not be easy. However, I am confident that you will succeed in fulfilling your mandate to make substantive recommendations to the General Assembly on the elements of a draft text of an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Our common interest to provide future generations with healthy and productive oceans should enable us to move forward. At this important juncture of your work, I therefore encourage you to continue the constructive and cooperative spirit that marked the previous three sessions of this Preparatory Committee and find a way forward that you can all agree upon and recommend to the General Assembly.



I wish you every success in fulfilling the challenging mandate with which you have been entrusted and I assure you of the continued full support of my Office through in particular the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea.

Thank you.