



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

Remarks

by

Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares,

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

**Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of the establishment of the Commission on
the Limits of the Continental Shelf**

New York, 10 March 2017

Chairperson of the Commission on the Limits of the
Continental Shelf, Mr. Lawrence F. Awosika,
President of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea,
H.E. Mr. Vladimir Golitsyn,
Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority,
H.E. Mr. Michael Lodge,

Excellencies,
Members of the Commission,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to address this Open Meeting celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. Mr. Chairperson, members of the Commission, current and past, I did not want to miss the opportunity to personally congratulate you for the accomplishments reached throughout the last 20 years.

It is also a privilege for me to bring greetings on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on such a momentous occasion.

This year is full of celebrations and events relevant for the Law of the Sea. In June, the Oceans Conference will take place here in Headquarters, along with the celebration of World Oceans Day.



Later in November it will be the fiftieth anniversary of the historic statement to the First Committee of the General Assembly by the Ambassador Arvid Pardo of Malta, as well as the thirty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

As we all know, the Convention established the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, as well as the International Seabed Authority as well as the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. I am pleased to see the President of the Tribunal and the Secretary-General of the Authority here among us, celebrating the twenty anniversary of the Commission.

Today we assembled here to celebrate the work of the Commission. In this regard, I wish to pay tribute to the major accomplishments of this body during the past two decades. Among its early achievements, the Commission translated the scientific and technical elements of article 76 of the Convention into guidelines and established a procedural framework.

This eventually allowed States Parties to understand the scientific and technical complexities of article 76, prepare and make their submissions, and have them examined in an orderly and structured manner. Also, the Commission has thus far issued 26 recommendations on the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles of submitting States, and is currently in the process of examining other 14 submissions.

Several coastal States have already acted upon these recommendations and deposited the information and data on the delineation of the outer limits.

The impact of this process and of the recommendations of the Commission is considerable. It enables submitting States to fully exercise their sovereign rights over the resources of additional millions of square kilometres of seafloor and its subsoil.

It is obvious that the drafters of the Convention could not have foreseen that the advancements in the technical and scientific understanding of the continental shelf and new technologies for deep sea exploration would transform the work of the Commission into an extraordinarily complex and time-consuming task. The number of submitting States was underestimated as well.

To this date, the Commission has received 82 submissions by 67 coastal States, including seven joint submissions, several partial submissions as well as five revised submissions which were made after recommendations had been issued. The Commission expects to receive further submissions.



This remarkable workload presents a number of challenges for the future. For my part, I wish to assure Member States and the Commission that the Office of Legal Affairs of the Secretariat of the United Nations will continue to do its utmost to assist the Commission in the fulfilment of its functions. I am happy to note that, throughout the years, members of the Commission have appreciated the level of services provided to it by the Secretariat.

Before concluding my intervention I would be remiss if I didn't express, on behalf of the Secretariat, deep appreciation to those States that have made contributions to the two Trust Funds related to the work of the Commission. I refer to the (i) Trust Fund for the purpose of defraying the cost of participation of the members of the Commission from developing States in the meetings of the Commission and (ii) Trust fund for the purpose of facilitating the preparation of submissions.

In concluding, Mr. Chairperson, I wish to extend my sincere congratulations to all members of the Commission, present and past, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of this body and transmit my best wishes for the future as the Commission continues to fulfil its important mandate.

As this is the last session of the term of office of the current members of the Commission, I would also like to seize this opportunity to wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

Thank you.