



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

Intergovernmental Conference on 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

**Remarks by Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares
Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and
United Nations Legal Counsel,
Secretary-General of the Conference**

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(Conference Room 2)**

Distinguished President of the Conference,

President of the General Assembly,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The opening of this Intergovernmental Conference today represents a historic moment. It is the first time in more than 20 years – since the adoption of the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement in 1995 – that a conference was convened to negotiate a legally binding international instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The Conference represents a critical phase in the discussions of the General Assembly on issues relating to marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. These issues have benefited from extensive discussions in the context of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group mandated to study issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.



Indeed, the landmark decision of the General Assembly to convene this Conference, followed from the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group, and its recognition of the need for the comprehensive global regime to better address the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. More recently, the Preparatory Committee established by resolution 69/292 has also recommended elements of a draft text of an international legally binding instrument under UNCLOS, which the General Assembly submitted for consideration by this Conference, in its resolution 72/249.

Distinguished delegates,

Through this Conference, you have an opportunity to contribute to the further development of the international legal framework for the oceans.

Strengthening the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity, including in areas beyond national jurisdiction, is vital for present and future generations. The oceans form an integral and essential component of the Earth's ecosystem and are critical to sustaining it. It is thought that marine biodiversity produces a third of the oxygen that we breathe. It also moderates global climate conditions, provides a valuable source of protein for human consumption, and is host to many organisms of interest to various sectors. However, the pressures on marine biodiversity are increasing. The First World Ocean Assessment indicates that the world's oceans are facing major pressures simultaneously, with such great cumulative impacts that the limits of its carrying capacity are being or, in some cases, have been reached. It concluded that if these problems are not addressed, there is a major risk they will combine to produce a destructive cycle of degradation in which the ocean can no



longer provide many of the benefits that humans currently enjoy. These observations are valid both within and beyond national jurisdiction.

Distinguished Delegates,

This Conference has been convened by the General Assembly to consider the recommendations of the Preparatory Committee on the elements, and to elaborate the text of an internationally legally binding instrument under UNCLOS, with a view to developing the instrument as soon as possible.

Initially with respect to 2018, 2019 and the first half of 2020, the Conference will meet for four substantive sessions, in addition to the present Organizational Meeting. The task before you, beginning with your consideration of organizational matters over the coming days, including the process for the preparation of the zero draft of the instrument, is considerable. I have no doubt, however, that your negotiations will be conducted in a spirit of cooperation in recognition of the vital importance of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. I wish you every success, Madam President and all Conference participants, in fulfilling the challenging mandate with which you have been entrusted and I assure you of my continued full support, and that of my colleagues in the Office of Legal Affairs, and in particular the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea.

Thank you.