



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

**Twenty-sixth Meeting of States Parties
to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea,**

Opening remarks

by

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Madam President,

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate you, Ms. Georgina Guillén Grillo, on your election as President of the twenty-sixth Meeting of States Parties. Allow me, on behalf of the Secretary-General, to convey to you and to participating delegations best wishes for fruitful and productive deliberations.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a real privilege to join you on the occasion of the opening of the twenty-sixth Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Allow me to join you, Madam President, in welcoming to this Meeting the President of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, H.E. Mr. Vladimir Golitsyn; the Registrar of the Tribunal, Mr. Philippe Gautier; the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority, H.E. Mr. Nii Odunton; and the Chairperson of the Commission on the



Limits of the Continental Shelf, Mr. Lawrence Awosika, who will provide this Meeting with an update of their work and activities.

Distinguished delegates,

At a time when the ocean and its resources have become the focus of many international legal instruments, processes and initiatives, the continuing relevance and important role of the Convention, as the “constitution for the oceans”, in strengthening international peace and security and ensuring sustainable development of the oceans and seas is clearer than ever.

Most recently, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was a transformative moment for the international community as a whole as well as for the Organization.

In the 2030 Agenda, Member States of the United Nations recognized the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and seas and of their resources for sustainable development, including through their contributions to poverty eradication, sustained economic growth, food security and creation of sustainable livelihoods.

In adopting the Agenda, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to international law and emphasized that the Agenda was to be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the rights and obligations of States under international law.

As we all know, target 14c under the Goal 14 - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development – calls for enhancement of the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in UNCLOS, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of “The Future We Want”.

In light of these developments, the goals of universal participation in the Convention and its effective implementation have become even more important. I wish to recall that the General Assembly called upon all States that have not done so, to become parties to the Convention and the Part XI Agreement. The goal of universal participation seems to be closer now, more



than two decades after the entry into force of the Convention, as the number of parties currently stands at 167, including the European Union.

While there has been no increase in the number of States parties to the Convention since the last Meeting of States Parties, the number of parties increased with respect to the Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of the Convention and stands currently at 148, after the accession of Antigua and Barbuda earlier this year. Given the inseparable package that this Agreement forms with the Convention, it would be desirable if all States parties to the Convention, which have not yet expressed their consent to be bound by this Agreement, consider doing so as soon as possible.

I am also pleased to note an increase in the participation of Member States in the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the Convention relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. The recent accession of Chile has increased the number of parties of the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement to 83.

The Implementing Agreements, and other instruments that have further developed the regime for the oceans, as reflected in the Convention, demonstrate that the legal framework of the Convention, within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, is not static. It allows for further elaboration of specific areas of the law of the sea to address particular challenges concerning the oceans.

Now, a new page has turned with the start of the work of the Preparatory Committee established by General Assembly resolution 69/292 on the 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.

I have followed with attention the first session of the Committee, which has addressed issues relating to marine genetic resources, including questions on the sharing of benefits, measures such as area-based management tools, including marine protected areas, and environmental impact assessments, capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology. I am pleased to note the centrality of the Convention during the course of these negotiations.



Distinguished delegates,

Let me also take this opportunity to acknowledge and to highlight the important contribution of the three bodies established by the Convention towards the advancement of its goals. In particular, I wish to extend my congratulations to the Tribunal, as year 2016 marks the 20th anniversary of its establishment. I understand that, on Thursday 23 June 2016 the Tribunal will hold a round table to mark this anniversary.

In this connection, I would like to recall that the Office of Legal Affairs, through its Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, provides services to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

As you all know, the Commission faces a significant workload - seventy-seven submissions have been received so far by the Commission, as well as four revised submissions. These figures put in perspective the pressure that such workload puts on members of the Commission.

This issue has been the subject of ongoing discussions in this forum, in particular with regard to the conditions of service of the members of the Commission. Let me recall that in resolution 70/235, dated 23 December 2015, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide cost-effective, transportable, non-structural improvements to address some of the immediate working space needs of the Commission. I wish to inform you that work in this regard is underway and should be completed ahead of the forthcoming 41st session of the Commission. The Director of the Division will provide more details in this regard.

The General Assembly also expressed its intention to continue exploring options for the provision of medical coverage to members. For its part, the Secretariat is doing its utmost to support the States parties and the Member States during their deliberations on that issue.

I also wish to bring to your attention that, for the second time since the last Meeting, a deadline for the call for nominations to appoint a member of the Commission has passed with no nomination being made. In this regard, I wish to stress that the effective functioning of the Commission depends on the full membership in the Commission and on the full attendance of its members at the sessions.



Distinguished delegates,

I wish to recall that General Assembly resolution 70/235 amended the terms of reference of the Trust Fund for the purpose of facilitating the preparation of submissions to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf for developing States, in particular the least developed countries and small island developing States, and compliance with article 76 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The amendments allow the Secretariat to provide financial assistance to developing States for the purpose of meeting with the Commission and its subcommissions, when these are considering their submission, upon the Commission's invitation.

In that regard, I wish to inform you that procedures have been put in place, and that the Secretariat, despite challenges associated with the timing required for processing applications, is ready to provide assistance under the amended terms of reference for the upcoming 41st session. Further details on these matters will be provided to the Meeting by the Director of the Division in due course.

Distinguished delegates,

I trust that the States Parties will continue to advance the goals of the Convention - peaceful uses of the oceans, equitable and efficient utilization of their resources, conservation of their living resources, and the study, protection and preservation of the marine environment.

On behalf of the Secretary-General, allow me to convey to you my best wishes for fruitful deliberations and a successful outcome for this Meeting of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Thank you very much.