



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

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

Opening remarks

by

Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares,

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

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Madame President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a real privilege to join you on the occasion of the opening of the twenty-seventh Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Allow me to transmit the greetings of the Secretary-General to this Meeting.

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate you, Ambassador Hauksdóttir, on your election as President of the twenty-seventh Meeting of States Parties.

Let me join you, Madame 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. Michael Lodge; 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 the important work and activities of the three bodies established by the Convention.



Distinguished delegates,

This past week, the United Nations hosted the Oceans Conference, bringing together Governments, the United Nations system, other intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions, the scientific community, the private sector, philanthropic organizations and other actors to identify ways and means to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14. This event, meant to renew our commitment to the oceans, concluded with the adoption of a Call for Action entitled “Our Ocean, Our Future”. In that document, among other things, Member States emphasized that their actions to implement Goal 14 should be in accordance with, reinforce and not duplicate or undermine, existing legal instruments, arrangements, processes, mechanisms or entities. Member States also affirmed the need to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 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”.

The General Assembly has continuously emphasized the universal and unified character of the Convention, and called upon all States that have not done so, to become parties to the Convention and the Part XI Agreement. More than two decades after the entry into force of the Convention, the goal of universal participation continues to become closer, as the number of parties currently stands at 168, including the European Union. In this regard, allow me, Madame President, to welcome Azerbaijan to the Meeting as the newest State Party to the Convention.

Distinguished delegates,

On the occasion of this meeting, 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 five revised submissions. These figures put in perspective the pressure that such workload puts on members of the Commission. However, despite these challenges, the Commission has delivered 26 sets of recommendations, including in three revised submissions.

In that regard, I would like to make reference to deposits of the outer limits of the continental shelf established on the basis of the recommendations of the Commission, pursuant to article 76, paragraph 9. I note that some States, having



received recommendations from the Commission, have followed up by establishing the limits of the continental shelf with reference to them by making a deposit of relevant data and information with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority. I wish to reiterate the readiness of the Secretariat to continue to assist Member States that have received recommendations by the Commission in fulfilling their deposit obligation and then to give due publicity to the deposited information as provided for in the Convention.

The workload of the Commission, which is expected to continue to increase with new submissions, is considerable its members and the Secretariat. Last year, I had the pleasure to inform the Meeting about the efforts which ultimately led to the improvements of working space for members of the Commission. In the period since the last Meeting, the Secretariat has also continued to identify suitable options for medical insurance.

This year, I wish to note another set of concerns which have already been highlighted by the Chairperson of the Commission in his letter to you, Madame President. These concerns relate to the data processing, storage and data security, an element of particular importance in the age of cyberattacks and given the considerable value of data made available by submitting States to the Commission for the purpose of the delineation of the outer limits of the continental shelf. Allow me to express a hope that this Meeting will give due consideration to these concerns.

Distinguished delegates,

You have a busy agenda ahead. In addition to the annual reports from the institutions established under the Convention and the budgetary matters of the Tribunal, you will conduct elections of seven members of the Tribunal and 21 members of the Commission. In this regard, I wish to express my appreciation for the contribution of the outgoing members of the Tribunal and the Commission for the work done during their respective terms of office. I also wish good luck to all candidates.

The election of members of the Commission marks the beginning of a new cycle for this important body. In this context, I would recall the provision of annex II to the Convention that ensures a balanced geographic representation in the Commission. Article 2, paragraph 3, of the annex, stipulates that not less than three members of the Commission shall be elected from each geographical region. In this regard, I note with concern the persistent difficulty of one of the regional groups to identify the number of candidates to which the group is entitled under this provision. As a consequence, for most of its previous term of office, the Commission has operated with only 20 members and some of the subcommissions had to be established with only six members instead



of seven. Owing to this fact and to the absences of other members, frequently for medical reasons, on a number of occasions, only 19 or 18 members participated in the sessions of the Commission. 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. The critical importance of ensuring full participation and equitable geographical representation in the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf cannot be overemphasized.

I recognize that the decision to nominate a member of the Commission remains a complex one as it implies a significant burden on the human and financial resources of the nominating States. However, the only viable way forward to make sure that the Commission can deal with the workload and adopt balanced decision it to ensure that it operates with full membership.

Distinguished delegates,

The twenty-sixth Meeting requested States parties that nominate candidates to formally undertake to support their candidates, in accordance with article 2, paragraph 5, of annex II to the Convention, and that such undertaking would be brought to the attention of the Meeting of States Parties at the time of the election of the members of the Commission. In its call for nominations, the Secretariat drew the attention of States Parties to this decision. I am pleased to report that all nominations have been accompanied by such an undertaking.

In recalling the obligation of States Parties to defray the costs of participation in the work of the Commission by the members nominated by them, I cannot stress enough the importance of the Trust Fund established by General Assembly resolution 55/7 for the purpose of defraying the cost of participation of the members of the Commission from developing States in the meetings of the Commission.

At a later stage, the Deputy-Director of the Division will provide further details on the balance of this Trust Fund as well as of the Trust Fund established for the purpose of facilitating the preparation of submissions. However, I take this opportunity to urge delegations to contribute especially to the Trust Fund for the participation of the members of the Commission from developing States in the work of the Commission, given the potentially adverse implications that its depletion would have on the ability of the Commission to progress in its work.

Distinguished delegates,



In closing, 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.

I wish to assure the continuous commitment of the Division, and the Office of Legal Affairs as a whole, in providing high quality services to States Parties to the Convention, to this Meeting, and the Commission; as well as in continuing fruitful cooperation and coordination with the Tribunal and the Authority.

Madame President, allow me to wish you and the delegations present fruitful deliberations. I am sure that under your guidance this Meeting of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea will be successful.

Thank you very much.