



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

**Thirty-fourth session of the
Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf**

Statement

by

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The United Nations Legal Counsel

Conference Room 6 (NLB)
10 February 2014 at 10:00 a.m.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Members of the Commission,

On behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, I am pleased to welcome you to the opening of the plenary part of the thirty-fourth session of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

As you may recall, I began my tenure as the Legal Counsel of the United Nations in September last year and I had the opportunity to introduce myself to you at an informal meeting in November 2013 during the thirty-third session. Today, it is my great pleasure to address you for the first time during a plenary meeting.

I very much appreciate that this is a pivotal time for the Commission. With the Submission made by the Bahamas, which was received on Thursday 6 February, there are 71 submissions to the Commission, as well as two revised submissions and 46 sets of preliminary information notes, some of which have become submissions.

New submissions continue to be made at a steady pace. Since the thirty-third session, there have been four new submissions, made by Denmark, in respect of the North-

Eastern Continental Shelf of Greenland; Angola; Canada, in respect of the Atlantic Ocean; and the Bahamas.

The total number of submissions is expected to continue to rise. There are submissions which are currently being prepared by States Parties for whom the 10 year time line has not yet elapsed.

Additional submissions are likely to be made by other States when they become States Parties to the Convention.

Mr. Chairman,
Members of the Commission,

It is clear, in light of this, that you have a momentous task ahead of you. Despite the fact that you are not a full-time body, you have agreed to work in New York for 21 weeks each year. This represents a considerable personal sacrifice on your part and I am very grateful for your efforts. At the same time, your achievements have been considerable. There are currently 9 subcommissions actively considering submissions. This is an unprecedented number. Since the establishment of the Commission in 1997, you have adopted 18 Recommendations. I understand that more recommendations may be forthcoming in this session.

In this regard, I recall that a study prepared during the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea by the Secretariat estimated that there would be 35 coastal States with continental shelves beyond 200 nautical miles. Today, that number is believed to be more than 100. Therefore, when the Convention was negotiated it was not thought necessary to establish a full-time body to consider submissions from coastal States. This in itself represents a major challenge.

I note that in its most recent resolution on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (resolution 68/70), the General Assembly expressed its concern about the implications of the workload of the Commission for the conditions of service of its members. It requested the Secretary-General to explore options for providing medical insurance coverage to members of the Commission from developing States, whose participation may be facilitated through the relevant voluntary trust fund. To this end, the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea is currently exploring all available options. The preliminary results of this research are expected to be available by the second plenary week from 10 to 14 March 2014.

I remain committed to assisting the Commission as much as I can and I am particularly interested in this issue, which I am following closely.

I am pleased to note the decision of the twenty-third Meeting of States Parties to establish an open-ended working group to consider the conditions of service of the members of the Commission. The Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea

has been providing secretariat services to this group and will continue to keep the Commission informed of any developments.

Finally, I would like to recall the importance that States attach to the work of the Commission and, in turn, to the participation of all members in the work of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies. I understand that you addressed the issue of extended absences from the Commission last year with a view to improving attendance of members. I would like to emphasize that your attendance at every session of the Commission is critical in order for it to function effectively and to deliver recommendations as efficiently as possible, while maintaining a high level of quality and expertise when carrying out your functions.

In conclusion, let me note that the Secretary-General and I highly appreciate your dedication to the work of the Commission and would like to express our best wishes for your continued success. As did my predecessor, I will continue to support the Commission in the discharge of its important functions, through the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, to assist the Commission in its endeavours. In this regard, let me also recall that a fourth Geographic Information Systems officer, Ms. Zaric, has recently joined the Division.

I look forward to working with you in the coming years and wish you a successful thirty-fourth session.

Thank you.