



**UNITED NATIONS  
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

**Preparatory Committee established by General Assembly resolution  
69/292: 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**

**Opening remarks**

**by**

**Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares**

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

27 March 2017, 10:00am  
(Conference Room 2)

Distinguished Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I have the pleasure of welcoming you to the third session of the Preparatory Committee established by General Assembly resolution 69/292: 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.

At the outset, I wish to congratulate Ambassador Carlos Sergio Sobral Duarte of Brazil on his appointment as the Chair of the Preparatory Committee. I am confident that his knowledge of the issue, his experience and leadership will steer this process towards a successful conclusion.



I also wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the skilfulness, dedication and passion with which Ambassador Eden Charles of Trinidad and Tobago chaired the first and second sessions of the Preparatory Committee. Ambassador Charles's contribution to the process cannot be over emphasized. We wish him well in his new functions.

I am pleased to see a full room today. In this regard, on behalf of the Secretary General, I wish to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to Finland, Ireland, the Kingdom of Netherlands and New Zealand for their generous contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 69/292. In accordance with the terms of reference of the Trust Fund these contributions have allowed representatives from many developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, to attend this session of the Preparatory Committee.

Going forward, the Office of Legal Affairs continues to count on your support to ensure that the Trust Fund can provide meaningful assistance to developing countries throughout the process envisaged in resolution 69/292.

Distinguished delegates,

I am conscious of the workload that is in front of you at this critical juncture of the work of the Preparatory Committee. My remarks will therefore be brief. I shall focus on providing you with an overview of some important developments of relevance to the work of the Preparatory Committee that took place since its second session.



As you know, the General Assembly, in its resolution 71/257 on oceans and the law of the sea endorsed the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, at its seventh meeting. This includes the Programme of Work for the period 2017-2020 for the second cycle of the Regular Process. This Programme of Work envisages the preparation of outputs to support and interact with ongoing ocean-related intergovernmental processes.

These outputs will be specifically tailored to the requests and needs of these processes, including the work under General Assembly resolution 69/292. In this regard, I am pleased to note that the Technical Abstract of the First Global Integrated Marine Assessment on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction has been prepared by the Group of Experts and will be presented to you.

Furthermore, in the same resolution, the Assembly decided to continue the Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea for the next two years. It further decided that the Informal Consultative Process would focus its discussions at its eighteenth meeting, in 2017, on the theme “The effects of climate change on oceans” and at its nineteenth meeting, in 2018, on the theme “Anthropogenic underwater noise”.

In this regard, I am pleased to note that the advance and unedited reporting material on the topic of focus of its eighteenth meeting has been prepared by the Secretary-General and made available on the website of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea.



Since the second session last year, the General Assembly also conducted a review of the actions taken by States and regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements in response to the relevant paragraphs of resolutions 64/72 and 66/68 addressing the impacts of bottom fishing on vulnerable marine ecosystems and the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks. On that basis, the Assembly made a number of important recommendations, as contained in its resolution 71/123 on sustainable fisheries.

Distinguished delegates,

As you are all aware, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 70/303 adopted on 9 September 2016, the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, will be convened at United Nations Headquarters from 5 to 9 June 2017. Preparations are well underway for the Conference, which will aim to reverse the decline in the health of our ocean for people, planet and prosperity. The Conference is expected to be solutions-focused with engagement from all stakeholders.

I wish to note, in particular, that the preparatory meeting for the Conference was held from 15 to 16 February 2017 and approved the themes for the seven partnership dialogues which will be convened at the Conference. It also discussed elements of a “Call for Action”. A first round of informal consultations on the “Call for Action” took place last week.

Distinguished delegates,



I have witnessed, in recent months, the increased attention being paid to ocean-related matters, including this process, in all regions of the world, from all generations of life. All eyes are on you. I therefore encourage you to continue carrying forward the constructive and cooperative spirit that marked the previous sessions of this Preparatory Committee.

Your work over the next two weeks will be critical in making positive progress towards the objective of making substantive recommendations to the General Assembly on the elements of a draft text of an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Needless to recall that, in its resolution 69/292, the General Assembly decided that the Preparatory Committee would, by the end of 2017, report to the Assembly on its progress.

I am conscious that the task in front of you will not be easy. But you have a collective responsibility to ensure that the goal of conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction is achieved for the benefit of present and future generations.

I wish you every success in fulfilling the challenging mandate with which you have been entrusted and I assure you of the continued full support of the Office of Legal Affairs, and in particular of its Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea.

Thank you.