



**Thirty-Fifth Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations
Convention on the Law of the Sea**

*Agenda item 9: 'Information reported by the Secretary-General of the
International Seabed Authority.'*

23 June 2025

Statement by Madam Leticia Carvalho,
Secretary-General, International Seabed Authority

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**Statement by Madame Secretary-General
of the International Seabed Authority at SPLOS 35 (June 2025)**

Mister President, Distinguished Delegates,

I am deeply honored to address the States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) for the first time as Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority (ISA).

Allow me to begin by expressing my heartfelt gratitude for the confidence and support that the international community has placed in me through my election, and since. I recognize the significance of this moment – as the first woman, Latin American and Caribbean regional group representative, and oceanographer, to serve in this role – I pledge to uphold this trust.

I also wish to pay tribute to my predecessors for their dedication and service since 1996. Together, we stand on nearly three decades of ISA's work anchored in the solid foundation of UNCLOS, which remains the constitution of the oceans and the guarantor of peace, security and cooperation at sea.

I would like to begin by extending my sincere congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election. It is an honour for all Member States to have a diplomat of such deep commitment and extensive experience in ocean affairs presiding over this meeting.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Ambassador Duncan Laki Muhumuza of Uganda for his dedicated work and unwavering support for the Authority over the past year. His election and continued service as President of the Council for the thirtieth session of the ISA stand as clear testimony to his commitment and leadership.

Further, my sincere gratitude to the Legal Counsel and the Director of DOALOS, and their teams, for the support and on-going collaboration, especially in the context of UN-Oceans.

Finally, I take this opportunity to express my deepest thank you to States Parties. It is your belief in upholding multilateralism and international law through the Authority's mandate that will ensure a prosperous future for people and planet.

Upholding UNCLOS and the Rule of Law in the Ocean

UNCLOS, now with 170 Parties, enjoys near-universal adherence – a testament to our collective commitment to a rules-based order for the oceans. This regime, including the Part XI common heritage framework, has ensured international cooperation and stability in areas beyond national jurisdiction for decades.

Yet today, this order is at risk. It is the responsibility of our global community to be steadfast in upholding the integrity of UNCLOS against erosion; No nation or entity should act alone when it comes to the global commons of the deep seabed. We must prevent attempts at “unilateral exploitation” of the seabed, especially efforts to accelerate seabed activities outside the agreed international frameworks. Such actions would jeopardize the rule of law at sea and the foundational principle enshrined in UNCLOS: that the seabed and its mineral resources are the common heritage of humankind; thereby undermining the International Seabed Authority itself

Multilateralism remains the only viable path for managing our ocean peacefully and equitably. We have spent decades building trust and consensus under UNCLOS. There is no justification to deviate from this evolutionary, precautionary, and collaborative approach that has served us so well. In this spirit, I echo the powerful call made by the United Nations Secretary-General at the recent UN Ocean Conference: *“The deep seabed cannot become the Wild West.”*

We must not allow a free-for-all scramble in the abyss. The ISA was created precisely to prevent a lawless race to the bottom for resources and to ensure that any activities in the Area are carried out for the benefit of all countries, particularly developing States, and with due regard for the marine environment. We owe it to our children and grandchildren to maintain the seabed as a realm of cooperation, not competition, and to steward it with a long-term vision.

In this regard, I welcome the Political Declaration adopted at the 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference, which reiterates the need to increase scientific knowledge on deep sea ecosystems and recognizes the role of the ISA in the promotion and encouragement of marine scientific research in the Area. The Declaration further acknowledges the ISA's progress in developing robust rules, regulations, and procedures for potential exploitation of mineral resources in the Area and highlights the critical importance of ensuring effective protection of the marine environment, pursuant to article 145 of UNCLOS.

This affirmation by the global community gives renewed momentum to our collective efforts.

Mr. President, Excellencies, in my remarks today, I will emphasize the advancements made in key areas of the Authority's work. For a more detailed account, I recommend referring to the annual report submitted by the Secretary-General to the Assembly, pursuant to Article 166, paragraph 4 of the Convention, dated 11 April 2025.

ISA membership and status of the agreements

As stipulated in the Convention, all States Parties are ipso facto members of the Authority. With the accession of San Marino to the Convention on 19 July 2024, the membership of the Authority has reached 170 members, underscoring -as mentioned- the near-universal adherence to the Convention and its regime. Among these members, 17 States joined the Convention prior to the adoption of the 1994 Agreement and have not yet ratified it. I strongly encourage those States to consider ratifying the 1994 Agreement to ensure legal coherence with the current institutional framework, despite the current arrangements and the interpretation rule reflected in General Assembly resolution 48/263 and the Agreement itself.

Furthermore, I wish to inform members that, as of 31 March 2025, 17 members of the Authority have deposited the charts or lists of geographical coordinates indicating the outer limits of their continental shelf, in accordance with Article 84, paragraph 2, of the Convention. Accurate delineation of all

continental shelf areas, including those extending beyond 200 nautical miles, is essential for establishing the precise boundaries of the Area. I therefore urge all coastal States to submit their charts or coordinates as soon as the outer limits of their continental shelf have been established, in line with the relevant provisions of the Convention.

Between June 2024 and the present date, three governments—Ghana, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Fiji—appointed permanent representatives to the Authority for the first time, thereby establishing permanent missions. As a result, a total of 42 members now maintain permanent missions to the Authority.

Financial Status

Mr. President, before delving into other pressing matters concerning the Authority, I would like to briefly refer to, as is usual at this meeting, the financial state of the Authority.

At its twenty-ninth session, the Assembly, following the recommendation of the Finance Committee, adopted the budget for the financial period 2025–2026 in the amount of \$26,427,000.

As of 31 March 2025, 57 per cent of the value of contributions to the 2025 budget due from member States and the European Union had been received. Outstanding contributions from member States for prior periods (1998–2024) amounted to USD \$604,854. Notices are sent regularly to member States, reminding them of the arrears. As at 31 March 2025, there are 44 members of the Authority that had been in arrears for two years or more, therefore potentially affecting its voting rights in accordance with article 184 of the Convention and rule 80 of the rules of procedure of the Assembly. I wish once again to urge all States parties to pay their outstanding contributions without delay to make their voices heard.

As at 31 March 2025, the balance of the working capital fund stood at \$756,808, against an approved level of \$825,000. With regard to the trust fund for extrabudgetary support for the Authority, it had a net balance of USD \$613,226 as at 31 March 2025.

Regarding the voluntary trust fund to cover the costs of participation of members of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee from developing countries, I wish to acknowledge the contributions made by China, France, Ireland, Netherlands and the Philippines during the reporting period. I encourage States Parties to step forward and continue contributing to these funds to ensure full and meaningful participation in the meetings in these critical times.

With regard to the voluntary trust fund established pursuant to the Assembly's 2017 decision to support the participation of Council members from developing States in additional meetings dedicated to the development of the draft regulations, the fund had a balance of \$3,071 as of 31 March 2025. During the reporting period, contributions were received from the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Portugal. I animate all other Member States to contribute to this fund, ensuring broader and more inclusive representation within the Council.

I will now proceed to address some of the other significant issues that the Authority is currently examining.

ISA's Mandate and Progress on the Mining Code

Mr. President, the mandate of the ISA remains clear and unwavering. We are entrusted, on behalf of humankind, with managing the mineral resources of the deep seabed (the Area), representing 54% of our global ocean, ensuring the equitable sharing of benefits, and guaranteeing the effective protection of the marine environment, in accordance with UNCLOS and the 1994 Implementation Agreement. Central to this mandate is the completion of a comprehensive set of Regulations which will govern any future mineral exploitation in the Area. Over the past year, significant progress has been made toward finalizing this "Mining Code"-as it is also commonly referred to. This work has remained the top priority of the ISA's organs. I am pleased to report that Member States have continued to engage in good faith, demonstrating a shared commitment to developing a strong, comprehensive legal framework, as required by UNCLOS.

During the twenty-ninth session of the International Seabed Authority, held in two parts in 2024, the Council prioritized the continued development of the draft regulations for the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area. Building on the roadmap endorsed in 2022 and updated in July 2023, the President of the Council presented a consolidated text of the draft regulations, alongside supporting documents including a suspense text, a compilation, and a matrix of environmental standards and guidelines. These materials formed the basis for a first full reading of the consolidated text, extensive thematic discussions, and intersessional work facilitated by dedicated working groups. The session culminated in the endorsement of a revised roadmap for the continuation of this work during the thirtieth session in 2025.

In March 2025, the first part of the thirtieth session of the Council resumed these discussions, based on a revised consolidated text and updated supporting materials. The Council advanced intensive discussions through to draft regulation 55, conducted thematic exchanges on unresolved conceptual issues, and

engaged in high-level debate on the development of standards and guidelines using a reference list compiled by the Secretariat. To reinforce progress, the Council welcomed a proposal by the President to establish a “group of friends of the President” as an additional working modality. It was agreed that negotiations would continue in July 2025 with the goal of completing the reading of the revised consolidated text, reviewing annexes and schedules and advancing on the associated standards and guidelines.

While some States Parties and observers have expressed differing views on the desirability or timing of future mining activities, the overwhelming majority have remained committed to continuing the negotiations with good faith, diligence and unity, recognizing the imperative of establishing a robust and science-based regulatory regime. Member States have also reiterated their support for the Authority’s exclusive jurisdiction under UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement—particularly in the face of any unilateral actions that may undermine the international regime.

We are now on the cusp of finalizing the Mining Code, and it is imperative that we get it right. This means a code that establishes clear and enforceable rules, strict environmental standards, and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms. Indeed, the Council’s deliberations had reaffirmed that no exploitation activity should begin until a proper set of regulations, standards and guidelines has been adopted and is in force, and that no plan of work for exploitation would be approved prematurely. The Authority’s most important task now is to complete the regulatory framework in a *timely but responsible manner*—one that ensures the highest level of environmental protection and faithfully upholds the principle of the common heritage of humankind.

And, Mr. President, allow me to emphasize that when I speak of the need for timely action, this should in no way be interpreted as a call for rushed or unconsidered decisions. On the contrary, the Authority is acting in strict accordance with the regulatory framework set out in the Convention, and the Council is following through on its own decisions and successive roadmaps and timelines adopted to ensure that it fulfils its mandate properly and responsibly.

Member States must fully assume the responsibilities conferred upon them by the Convention through the organs of the Authority. The time to deliver has come—for the benefit of us all.

Updates on exploration activities carried out in the Area

Mr. President, let me now provide an update on the status of the exploration activities carried out in the Area. As of 31 March 2025, there are currently 30 active contracts for exploration. From July 2024 to April

2025, five periodic review reports were submitted, all of which are currently under evaluation. During this reporting period, the Compliance Assurance and Regulatory Management Unit of the Secretariat conducted two inspections.

At its March 2025 meeting, the Legal and Technical Commission reviewed the responses from eight contractors that had been identified in its previous session as requiring particular attention. It was noted that while some contractors provided satisfactory responses, others required additional clarification. Consequently, select contractors were invited to a virtual discussion with the Commission in May 2025, as outlined in ISBA/29/LTC/6, to address ongoing concerns and enhance mutual understanding. The Commission will report the results of these discussions to the Council in July 2025.

Additionally, from 30 September to 2 October 2024, the Secretariat hosted the seventh annual consultation meeting with contractors in Busan, Republic of Korea, to discuss common interests and share best practices in deep-sea exploration. This event saw participation from 48 representatives of various contracting parties. I would like to express my appreciation to India for generously offering to host the next contractors' meeting.

During the Council meeting in March 2025, the Secretary-General facilitated three dialogues: one with the contractors, an inaugural dialogue with sponsoring States, and a third one with observers. Participants expressed their appreciation for these initiatives by the Secretary-General.

With respect to the activities of the Interim Director-General of the Enterprise, since his appointment in December 2023, he has carried out his functions in accordance with the 1994 Agreement and the Council's directives. His undertakings have included active participation in Council negotiations on the draft regulations, intersessional working groups, and bilateral meetings with stakeholders. While based at ISA headquarters and reporting administratively to the Secretary-General, he remains accountable to both the Council and the Assembly, to which he presented his first report during the twenty-ninth session and is expected to present his second in July 2025.

Programmatic activities

Mr. President, even as negotiations continue, the Authority has advanced its broader mission. Its mandate extends well beyond the development of rules, regulations, and procedures for the responsible and sustainable use of deep-sea mineral resources. It also encompasses the stewardship of the Area and its resources, the promotion and encouragement of marine scientific research, the facilitation of technology

transfer, the dissemination of scientific knowledge to developing States, and the advancement of capacity development.

Advancing Marine Scientific Research, Data Sharing, and Biodiversity Cooperation

Over the past year, we have made remarkable strides in marine scientific research (MSR) in the Area and in our efforts to share knowledge for the benefit of all. Since the adoption of the ISA's Action Plan in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science, the Secretariat has convened 29 collaborative scientific events – including workshops, webinars, and expert panels – engaging over 1,000 scientists and experts worldwide. Through these initiatives, and in partnership with universities and research institutes, we are deepening understanding of deep-sea ecosystems, from seafloor biodiversity to oceanographic processes. We have forged 44 strategic research partnerships, and 19 ISA Member States (along with the EU) have provided financial or in-kind support to advance our collective research priorities.

I am proud to report that, in 2025 at the UN Ocean Conference in Nice, ISA launched the Deep-Sea Biobank Initiative in collaboration with the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea. This project establishes a centralized repository of deep-sea biological samples and genetic data collected from the Area, available for research and capacity development. The Biobank will promote global access, facilitate training for scientists from developing States, and support interregional analyses through standardized sampling and data protocols. It will serve as a timely contribution to marine scientific cooperation and as a building block to support the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement's access and benefit-sharing regime.

Further, our new Memorandum of Understanding with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), also signed during the UNOC, establishes a framework for deeper collaboration. It covers information-sharing, scientific consultation, joint communication efforts, and the promotion of capacity development, including ocean literacy and gender equality. This cooperation exemplifies the coherence and coordination called for under the BBNJ framework.

A cornerstone of our MSR efforts is open data sharing. The ISA's DeepData platform continues to grow as the central global repository for data collected in the Area. In line with the FAIR principles (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable), DeepData now offers open access to vast amounts of non-confidential exploration data. The DeepData website has had approximately 19 million hits from over 321,000 visitors, who downloaded approximately 600 gigabytes of data from the database. We have also developed new interactive data tools and tutorials to help researchers and the general public explore

DeepData. In a significant boost to global data integration, the ISA has now partnered with UNESCO's IOC to incorporate oceanographic data from over 800 deep-sea sampling stations into the Ocean InfoHub, a worldwide network for marine data sharing.

In March 2025, the second edition of the “One Thousand Reasons” campaign to accelerate species descriptions and enhance consistency in taxonomic practices was launched, with a voluntary contribution by the Government of Ireland. This edition is specifically designed to support scientists in developing member States. The first edition led to the description of 90 new species and resulted in the publication of over 30 scientific papers.

These efforts demonstrate our commitment to transparency and to democratizing deep-sea science, so that scientists from all countries can access information about the Area's resources and environment. By expanding our knowledge base and making it openly available, we enable better decision-making and capacity-building, and we uphold UNCLOS Article 143's duty to promote international cooperation in marine scientific research.

Capacity Development, Technology Transfer, and Benefit-Sharing

Mr. President, ensuring that *all* States – particularly developing nations – can participate in and benefit from activities in the Area is at the heart of the ISA's mandate. Article 144 of UNCLOS mandates us with promoting the acquisition of knowledge and the transfer of marine technology to developing countries. I am proud to report that we have significantly ramped up our capacity-building and training programs. In the past year alone, 142 individuals from developing States (35% of them women) received hands-on training in various marine science and technology disciplines through ISA-sponsored initiatives. Many of these opportunities are provided in cooperation with our contractors and other partners, and they target the specific needs of least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing States, ensuring no one is left behind.

Building on the success of the workshop on advanced technologies for the priority domains, held in Portugal in April 2024, the secretariat has been invited by Kobe University and its Kobe Ocean-Bottom Exploration Centre to organize a second workshop in Kobe, Japan, in June 2025. The workshop will focus on emerging technologies for designing monitoring schemes in the context of potential future activities.

As part of our broader capacity development strategy, the Authority e-learning platform, *Deep Dive*, developed with contributions from 60 international experts, has reached participants across 104 countries.

The platform has achieved a 97% knowledge gain rate among its 141 participants certified users, underscoring its effectiveness and value. Building on this success, *Deep Dive* has expanded to offer tailored modules, including hybrid trainings such as a course on Environmental Impact Assessment delivered in collaboration with national and regional partners. With its sixth cohort now active and a final cohort scheduled for late 2025, *Deep Dive* continues to provide a scalable, accessible foundation for ISA’s growing suite of capacity development efforts, complementing practical training programmes and contributing meaningfully to the achievement of SDG 14.

We have also expanded our in-person training infrastructure: the ISA, in partnership with member States, established the *Joint Training and Research Centres*. The first Centre was launched in collaboration with China and has trained over 100 experts from developing countries, the latest on tools and methodologies for the development of regional environmental management plans. In April 2025, the Centre launched its first call for joint research projects with a focus on data and biodiversity. The ISA-Egypt Joint Training and Research Centre opened its doors in last September, 2024, with a course on environmental impact assessments for activities in the Area, training 18 experts from 12 African and Middle Eastern States. These centers, alongside national “expert deployment” initiatives and partnerships, are building a new generation of experts in ocean law and science across the globe.

In terms of equitable benefit-sharing, even before any mineral revenues flow, ISA’s programs are delivering tangible benefits to humanity. The ISA Endowment Fund continues to support training for scientists, and the newer Partnership Fund – a multi-donor trust fund established by the Assembly in 2022 targeted capacity development initiatives aligned with the needs of developing States – has already proven its worth. During the reporting period, contributions were received from China, France, Ireland, and Monaco. The Fund’s Board, which convened twice in 2024, approved support for several projects, including training opportunities for women in ocean science, a deep-sea literacy initiative in Mozambique, a Women in Science expedition, research on sediment plume management, and the MeioScool project on meiofauna – small seabed dwelling invertebrates- research in collaboration with IFREMER. Such efforts not only build capacity but also ensure that knowledge, opportunities, and ultimately the benefits of seabed resources are shared broadly and fairly.

Moreover, ISA places great emphasis on women’s empowerment in ocean science, aligning with our belief that the benefits of ocean development must be inclusive. Through the Women in Deep-Sea Research (WIDSR) Project, over 100 women scientists from around the world have gained training, mentorship and enhanced career opportunities in marine biology, engineering and policy. The “*See Her Exceed*” global mentoring program, launched in 2022, is now bearing fruit as its first cohort of women

scientists from developing countries complete their mentorship and deliver research outputs.

Synergies with the BBNJ Agreement

Distinguished delegates, as Secretary-General of the ISA, I warmly welcome our sister agreement, BBNJ, coming into force. Many of the objectives of the 2023 BBNJ Agreement *mirror the core mandate* that UNCLOS (and specifically Part XI) entrusts to the ISA. Issues such as capacity-building, transfer of marine technology, environmental protection, and benefit-sharing are common threads running through both regimes. Over the past 30 years, the ISA has gained unique experience in these areas, and we stand ready to share our expertise and to support the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement.

Already, the ISA has actively engaged in the BBNJ preparatory process, contributing to discussions on how the ISA will participate in the Conference of Parties to the new Agreement. We will continue to coordinate closely to ensure synergies, not overlaps: for example, ISA's data repositories and scientific research in the Area can inform BBNJ efforts on marine genetic resources and environmental impact assessments. Our capacity development programs can be aligned with the needs identified under the BBNJ Agreement, creating efficiency and avoiding duplication. Similarly, the concept of benefit-sharing under the BBNJ (for marine genetic resources) can draw lessons from the ISA's work on benefit-sharing for mineral resources – both grounded in the notion of equity and the common heritage of humankind. We envisage a complementary relationship where the ISA continues to manage seabed mineral activities, while the BBNJ COP manages marine biodiversity, each within our respective mandates in a mutually reinforcing way. I am confident that through cooperation, we can strengthen coherence in ocean governance and uphold the integrity of UNCLOS's overall architecture.

Commemoration of 30 years –

This year, as we convene for the thirtieth session of the Assembly, we will hold special commemorative events to mark the 30th anniversary of the Authority. This occasion will underscore the vital role of the Convention in promoting governance, stability, and peace across the globe over the past three decades. It will also celebrate our initiatives and exceptional staff. I invite all delegations to reflect not only on our collective achievements—in advancing the rule of law, science, technology, sustainable use, and environmental protection—but also on the continued commitment needed to sustain and build upon this progress.

Final remarks: Defending the Common Heritage of Humankind – A Call for Unity

Mr. President, excellencies, in conclusion, permit me to deliver a clear and firm message: we must continue to stand together, under UNCLOS, to defend the common heritage of humankind and uphold intergenerational equity. The deep seabed, with all its mineral wealth and scientific wonders, does not belong to one nation or one generation – it belongs to *all of us*, collectively. The visionaries who crafted UNCLOS forty years ago understood this truth, declaring the Area and its resources the common heritage of humankind. Today, we carry that vision forward in the face of new challenges. We cannot allow short-term interests or impatience to derail the multilateral consensus that guards our shared heritage. Decisions about the use of the seabed must continue to be made together, through the ISA and in line with the rule of law, so that benefits are shared and the environment is safeguarded.

Let us also remember that true benefit-sharing from the oceans is not only about monetary returns or minerals extracted – it is about sharing knowledge, building capacity, and ensuring that all countries have a seat at the table where decisions are made about our planet’s last global commons; its final frontier. It is about making sure that a significant portion of any future revenues from seabed mining, if it occurs, go toward the sustainable development of developing nations and the stewardship of the ocean environment. It is about solidarity across generations: we must manage the deep sea in a way that future generations inherit a healthy, well-preserved ocean ecosystem.

The international community has sent strong signals in recent months. World leaders, from the UN Secretary-General to heads of state, have underscored the need for caution, cooperation, and care. We take heart from these signals. We hear the call to “bank on multilateralism” in tackling the ocean’s challenges, and we fully agree. Multilateralism through UNCLOS is the *antidote* to any notion of a “Wild West” free-for-all. The ISA, as an institution born from UNCLOS, remains central to ensuring that activities in the deep ocean are conducted equitably, sustainably, and peacefully.

Under my leadership, the ISA will act as an honest broker and trustee for humankind – bringing all stakeholders together, facilitating science-based decision-making, and upholding the transparency and accountability of our processes. In doing so, we will strive to rebuild and strengthen trust in the ISA’s mission, so that all States – whether proponents or skeptics of seabed mining – have confidence that the common good, not narrow interests, is our guiding star.

Finally, distinguished delegates, let us reaffirm our unwavering commitment to multilateral cooperation under UNCLOS. As we deliberate here under Agenda Item 9, I invite all States Parties to renew their

support for the vision of the Convention. Together, let us ensure that the legacy we leave is one of cooperative stewardship over the blue heart of our planet. By defending the common heritage of humankind today, we do justice to those who came before us – and we fulfill our solemn duty to those who will follow.

Thank you.
