



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

Thirty-fourth Meeting of States Parties

to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

**Item 14 – Commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the entry into force
of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**

Statement

by

Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares

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

12 June 2024

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

It gives me great pleasure to join you here today to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. I am pleased to convey warm greetings from the Secretary General on this occasion.

Let me also congratulate you, Ambassador Muhumuza, on your election as President of the thirty-fourth Meeting of States Parties.



Over the past three decades, the Convention has truly risen to its distinction as the constitution for the oceans. It has made important contributions to the maintenance of peace, security and to prosperity for all peoples of the world.

The legal framework that the Convention sets out for all activities on the oceans and seas is almost universally accepted, with 169 Parties, including the European Union. States largely recognize that many provisions of the Convention reflect rules of customary international law.

In addition to its contributions to law and order at sea, the Convention as a framework instrument plays an important role in the development of the law of the sea. Let me highlight in this regard the recent adoption and opening for signature of the Agreement under the Convention on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction. Already, the Agreement has 90 signatories and seven ratifications. Let me also recall that on the occasion of the adoption of the BBNJ Agreement, the Secretary-General called on all States to spare no effort to ensure that the Agreement enters into force and to act without delay to sign and ratify the Agreement as soon as possible.

The BBNJ Agreement joins the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and the Part IX Agreement as the third implementing agreement under the Convention. This new Agreement is an historic feat of multilateralism in its own right, as well





as a timely reminder of the vital role of the Convention as a robust framework instrument of enduring contemporary relevance.

I would be remiss not to mention that the Convention has also contributed to the development of many rules, regulations and standards adopted under various sectoral instruments. These instruments complement and elaborate the general provisions of the Convention.

Multilateral cooperation has also been furthered by the three bodies established under the Convention, namely the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, the International Seabed Authority and the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

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While celebrating these achievements and milestones, we must also renew our commitment to taking action to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution, including plastic pollution and biodiversity loss. It is not an overstatement to say that together, they pose an existential threat to humanity.





We know that the effects of climate change, including sea-level rise, are being most acutely felt by low-lying coastal States, small island developing States and least developed countries. These issues, and opportunities to address them, were explored in depth at the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States just a few weeks ago.

Now more than ever, the full implementation of the Convention is essential to ensure sustainable ocean-based economies, protect and preserve the marine environment, and maintain international peace and security. The Convention and related instruments are the foundation for this action.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development complements and reinforces the legal regime for the ocean, including in the context of target 14.c of Sustainable Development Goal 14, with a view to enhancing 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 United Nations Ocean Conferences have been invaluable in bringing together all relevant stakeholders to assess challenges and opportunities relating to the implementation of Goal 14, and inspiring actions towards this end.





The declarations entitled “Call for Action”, adopted at the first Ocean Conference in 2017, and “Our ocean, our future, our responsibility”, adopted at the second Ocean Conference in 2022, provided important roadmaps for ambitious and concerted action to achieve Goal 14 as soon as possible.

We must build on this momentum as we look ahead to the third Ocean Conference in Nice, France, in 2025, to accelerate action and mobilize all actors towards the conservation and sustainable use of our ocean.

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In closing, I offer a final reflection that in its many important contributions to the codification and development of the law of the sea, the Convention has stood the test of time as a testament to multilateralism. Let us celebrate the Convention as evidence of our collective resolve to work towards our shared goal of ensuring the peaceful and sustainable use of the ocean and its resources, for present and future generations.

Thank you.

