



# General Assembly

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**Intergovernmental Conference on 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**

**Organizational meeting**

New York, 16–18 April 2018

## **Statement by the President of the Conference at the closing of the organizational meeting**

Over the past two days, and as mandated in resolution [72/249](#) of the General Assembly, the Conference discussed a number of organizational matters, including the process for the preparation of the zero draft of the 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 beginning of the organizational meeting, the Conference elected the President of the Conference. The Conference then heard statements from the President of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly, Miroslav Lajčák, and the Secretary-General of the Conference, Miguel de Serpa Soares, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel, as well as general statements from delegations.

During the organizational meeting, the Conference adopted a number of decisions on organizational matters. The Conference's attention was drawn to the modalities for the Conference, set out in relevant paragraphs of General Assembly resolution [72/249](#), including in relation to the participation of observers in paragraphs 12 to 15, the rules of procedure in paragraph 18 and decision-making in paragraphs 17 and 19. The Conference decided to apply these modalities to the Conference. In particular, with regard to the rules of procedure, the Conference decided that the rules of procedure and the established practice of the General Assembly, as modified by resolution [72/249](#), shall apply mutatis mutandis to the Conference.

As regards the Credentials Committee, the Conference decided that the composition of the Credentials Committee of the Conference would follow the composition of the Credentials Committee of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly and appointed Cabo Verde, China, Dominica, Indonesia, Ireland,



the Russian Federation, Uganda, the United States of America and Uruguay as members of the Credentials Committee of the Conference for the entire duration of the Conference.

The Conference decided to establish a Bureau composed of the President and 15 Vice-Presidents (three from each of the regional groups) to assist the President on procedural matters in the general conduct of the President's work. The Conference decided that the Vice-Presidents would serve in their national capacity, on the understanding that that decision did not in any way create a precedent for the allocation of seats for the bureaux of other processes related to the negotiation of international treaties. That decision was also taken on the understanding that, as far as possible, the Vice-Presidents should not change from one session to the next, in order to ensure stability in the Bureau. The President requested the regional groups to submit their nominations for Vice-Presidents to the secretariat as soon as possible, with a view to taking up the elections of the Vice-Presidents at the commencement of the first substantive session of the Conference, in September.

With regard to the organization of work for the Conference, the Conference agreed to adopt a flexible approach, making adjustments to the mode of work when necessary. Subsidiary organs and/or informal working groups will be established as the need arises in consultation with delegations and the Vice-Presidents. Having heard concerns concerning the holding of parallel meetings, the President informed the Conference of the intention to avoid parallel meetings to the extent possible.

Looking to the first substantive session of the Conference, there was a general understanding that the first session should focus on substantive discussions and not spend too much time on procedural matters. Time would be allocated to general statements as well as to the consideration of dates for the second and third sessions of the Conference, in 2019, bearing in mind that the decision on the dates would lie with the General Assembly. Substantive discussions will focus on the elements of the package as set out in resolution [72/249](#), bearing in mind the need for flexibility in the allocation of time for the various topics. The discussions will be organized around the four thematic clusters of the package and could be conducted in plenary or in informal working groups. The President will propose an organization of work in advance of the session, taking into account further consultations on this issue. Should informal working groups be established, they will remain under the overall authority of the President.

Concerning the process for the preparation of the zero draft of the instrument, it will be important to work towards a consensual outcome. As part of the preparations for the first substantive session of the Conference, the Conference requested the President to prepare a concise document, as an aid to discussions, building on the report of the Preparatory Committee established by resolution [69/292](#), bearing in mind the recommendations concerning sections A and B of section III of the report. Other materials produced in the context of the Preparatory Committee will also be considered. The document will not contain any treaty text. It will, rather, identify the issues that need to be further discussed and may include a limited number of possible questions to be addressed, as well as what the options are in respect of all the elements of the package and cross-cutting issues. The President will make every effort possible to make this document available to delegations well in advance of the first session of the Conference. It is understood that this document should put the Conference on a path to the preparation of a zero draft of the instrument but will not constitute, in itself, the zero draft.

During this organizational meeting, I have been struck by the collegial atmosphere that has permeated this conference room. Your positive, constructive and flexible approach to matters has resulted in an excellent meeting that will set the tone

for our future meetings. I sincerely thank each and every one of you for your can-do spirit and your support, which is muchly appreciated. I urge everyone to use the time between now and our meeting in September to review the issues and the available materials, including my homework, so that we can begin our meeting in September ready to discuss the issues thoroughly with one another. In the words of the Secretary-General of the Conference, Miguel de Serpa Soares, when we convene in September, I hope that we will experience a “rain of ideas” and a “storm of inspiration”.

It leaves me now to thank conference services and the interpreters for all their assistance during our meeting. I especially want to thank the secretariat, the Office of Legal Affairs, for the invaluable advice and assistance.

For everyone who is travelling, I wish you all safe travels and I look forward to working with all of you in September and beyond.

Thank you.

Rena Lee  
Ambassador for Oceans and Law of the Sea Issues and  
Special Envoy of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore

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