

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

**REMARKS AT CEREMONY COMMEMORATING 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL FOR THE LAW OF THE SEA
Hamburg, 7 October 2016**

Your Excellency Mr. Joachim Gauck, Federal President of Germany,
Your Excellency Mr. Olaf Scholz, Mayor of the City of Hamburg,
Your Excellency Mr. Vladimir Vladimirovich Golitsyn, President of the International Tribunal for the
Law of the Sea,
Honourable Members of the Tribunal,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Guten Tag. [Good afternoon]

I am honoured to join you today to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

I thank the President of the Tribunal, His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Vladimirovich Golitsyn, for inviting me, and His Excellency Mr. Joachim Gauck, Federal President of Germany, and His Excellency Mr. Olaf Scholz, Mayor of the City of Hamburg, for their warm welcome.

The Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg is indelibly linked with the world's oceans.

For centuries, merchants have looked to its harbour at the mouth of the Elbe River as a place to connect northern Europe to the rest of the world through maritime trade. Trade and the sea have made Hamburg an enterprising, innovative city.

Twenty years ago, these characteristics combined to form the perfect setting to for the Tribunal's establishment here.

Since then, the Tribunal has dealt with 25 cases.

Its judgments have been ground-breaking.

From the delimitation of the continental shelf of coastal States beyond 200 nautical miles, to the determination of the responsibilities and obligations of States sponsoring persons and entities with respect to activities in the Area, the Tribunal has distinguished itself for the thoroughness of its reasoning, the comprehensiveness of its research, and the speed with which it issue its judgments.

This is a vital but often overlooked aspect of justice.

I also wish to reflect on the uniqueness of this Tribunal among its peers in international law.

The Tribunal can settle not only disputes among States but also between the appropriate organs of the International Seabed Authority and both public and private entities acting as contractors, through its Seabed Disputes Chamber.

The Convention's widening of access to mechanisms for dispute settlement is certainly one of its most modern aspects.

Moreover, the Tribunal has recently confirmed, in its Case No. 21, concerning the Request for an advisory opinion submitted by the Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission, that it can issue Advisory Opinions when an international agreement related to the purposes of the Convention specifically provides for this.

The importance of the Tribunal is bound to grow over time.

The law of the sea was at the centre of the progressive development and codification efforts of public international law for several decades.

After the adoption and entry into force of the Convention and its Implementing Agreements it seemed that the attention of the international community had shifted to other areas of international law.

But, in recent years, the focus has returned to the law of the sea.

The number of processes and initiatives aimed at furthering its goals, especially in connection with the sustainable management of the oceans, clearly demonstrates this trend.

In this connection, let me underscore the importance of oceans and seas in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Sustainable Development Goal 14 reflects the global commitment to conserve and sustainably use the oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

To guarantee the capacity of the oceans to continue to provide for humanity's many and varied needs in a sustainable manner, we must do much more to ensure the uniform and consistent application of the Convention.

The Convention on the Law of the Sea continues to provide the overarching legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out.

This is why it is commonly referred to as the "Constitution for the oceans".

It is not a static instrument.

It allows for the further development of specific areas of the law of the sea and is thus capable of adapting to the evolving needs of the international community.

As the law of the sea continues to grow in relevance, so will the Tribunal.

I sincerely hope our commemorations today will encourage even more States to make use of the tools available to them under the Convention to settle international disputes related to the application and interpretation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and our use of the world's oceans .

I congratulate the Tribunal on its anniversary, and I count on its continued efforts to promote the peaceful and sustainable use of the world's seas and oceans. Let us carry forward the spirit of Hamburg: open-minded, global and firmly rooted in reality.

Vielen Dank. [Thank you]

[END]