

**Statement of Judge Thomas A. Mensah, President of the Tribunal, on the occasion of the
Ceremonial Inauguration of the Judges
18 October 1996**

The main business of this, the first public sitting of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, was to enable the Judges to make the declarations prescribed by the Statute of the Tribunal. That business having been completed, it is my duty to declare the sitting closed. But, before doing so, I wish to express, on behalf of all my colleague Judges, deep and sincere appreciation to you, Mr. Secretary-General, for having agreed to honour our Tribunal with your presence on this our truly red-letter day. We are especially thankful for your inspiring address and up-lifting message.

Our gratitude also goes to the high representatives of the Federal German Government and the dignitaries of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg who are with us today. As our esteemed hosts, your interest in our Tribunal and your concern for its success mean a great deal to us. We are, therefore, encouraged by your presence which is a public demonstration of your commitment to the Tribunal.

We are thankful to the many distinguished ambassadors, plenipotentiaries and other high representatives of State and Government who have come to witness this ceremony and to give us their moral support. We appreciate their gracious gesture and we value most highly their kind interest.

We are also gratified and honoured by the presence of the representative of the President of the International Court of Justice and the Registrar of the Court. We welcome them most warmly and we thank them sincerely for the fraternal support which their presence today so clearly betokens. We look forward to constructive and mutually beneficial relations with the Court, with the individual Judges and with its Registry.

Finally I wish, if I may, to avail myself of the opportunity to renew our thanks to our individual Governments for agreeing to nominate us for election to the Tribunal, to the States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea for electing us to the Tribunal and making financial provisions for our work, and to the German authorities, both Federal and City, who have gone to such great lengths to provide us with temporary accommodation and related facilities, pending the completion of the permanent headquarters premises for which they have so carefully and generously planned.

The Judges, the staff of the Registry and all associated with the Tribunal have been immensely impressed by the warmth of the welcome accorded to them by the authorities and people of the beautiful city of Hamburg. We are even more encouraged by the promises of continued assistance and co-operation from so many quarters. Our experience so far has confirmed our belief that Hamburg is a suitable seat for our Tribunal - not only because of its glorious traditions of the past but also on account of its current and continuing attractions and appeal, both physical and human.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea was established to offer an additional mechanism which States and other appropriate entities may use for the settlement of disputes which may arise between them in connection with activities related to the control, management and use of the resources of the seas and oceans, and the protection and preservation of the marine environment. Our Tribunal is not intended to replace any of the existing judicial bodies and arrangements for the settlement of disputes. Rather, it is to complement them and, thereby, afford to States and other entities a wider choice of the means by which they may seek legal redress, whenever they consider that their rights have been infringed or their interests compromised. It will be the constant wish and determined intention of my colleagues and myself to offer to the international community an alternative forum for the resolution of their differences and disputes in matters maritime when such an alternative is considered necessary or useful. It is our earnest hope that this Tribunal will be accepted as suitable for that task. We also trust that our rules and methods of work will appeal to all partners as responsive to their particular concerns.

We have today pledged to discharge our duties and to exercise our powers with honour, with impartiality and in all good conscience. We shall use our best and maximum endeavours, individually and collectively, to fulfil this pledge. We shall do whatever lies within our power to ensure that this Tribunal will serve the whole of humanity in its search for peace with justice; that it will be one of the custodians of that great principle enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Convention on the Law of the Sea: the principle that international disputes shall be settled by peaceful means in accordance with the principles of justice and international law. We cannot promise more, but we promise no less.

I now declare this public sitting of the Tribunal closed.