



INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL FOR THE LAW OF THE SEA
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Press Release

(Issued by the Registry)

ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT AND THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL FOR THE LAW OF THE SEA

HAMBURG, 5 October. The Judges of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea today elected Judge Thomas A. Mensah to serve as the first President of the Tribunal. Judge Rüdiger Wolfrum was elected Vice-President.

The Judges held their first meeting on 1 October in Hamburg, the seat of the newly established International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. This was the start of their first session devoted to organisational matters. Mr. Hans Corell, the Legal Counsel of the United Nations, represented the Secretary-General of the United Nations on this occasion. At the request of the Judges, Mr. Corell chaired the meetings of the Judges until the President of the Tribunal was elected.

The President and Vice-President are both elected for a period of 3 years. The President will preside over the meetings of the Judges and over hearings in international disputes submitted to the Tribunal. He has a casting vote in case of an equality of votes, and has an important supervisory function. The President will reside permanently in Hamburg, Germany, and will direct the work of the Tribunal. The Vice-President will take over the President's functions when the President is unable to act.

On 18 October 1996 there will be an inaugural session of the Judges in the City Hall of Hamburg. The same day, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, will lay the foundation stone of the future Tribunal building at Elbchaussee 380.

President Mensah is a national of Ghana and has for more than 20 years been at the International Maritime Organization (IMO); first as its Director of Legal Affairs and later as the Assistant Secretary-General. He was actively involved in the negotiations of the Law of the Sea Convention. After retiring from the IMO, he was appointed Professor of Law and Director of the Law of the Sea Institute at the University of Hawaii and to the

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Cleveringa Chair at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. Since 1995 he has been the High Commissioner of Ghana to the Republic of South Africa.

Vice-President Wolfrum is of German nationality and has a long-standing career as a Professor of International Law at the Universities of Mainz, Kiel and Heidelberg. He was a member of the German delegation to the negotiations leading up to the Law of the Sea Convention. Vice-President Wolfrum was also a judge at the Court of Appeal for Administrative matters. Since 1993 he has been the director of the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law.

The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea

The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea has been established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This Convention is one of the most comprehensive international treaties ever completed. It provides for the outer limits to which coastal States can claim jurisdiction in the waters surrounding them, and regulates prominent issues such as fisheries, navigation and the prevention of pollution of the marine environment. The Convention also pronounces the Deep Seabed as the common heritage of mankind and sets up the International Seabed Authority to regulate the exploitation of the Deep Seabed.

The Convention on the Law of the Sea is unique in that the mechanism for the settlement of disputes is incorporated into the document, making it obligatory for parties to the Convention to go through the settlement procedure in case of a dispute with another party. The Tribunal is the central forum for the settlement of disputes arising from the Convention.

The City of Hamburg with its rich maritime history as part of the League of Hanseatic Cities, obtained the seat of the Tribunal during the negotiation of the Convention which was signed in 1982. The temporary building, situated at Wexstrasse in the centre of Hamburg, opened on 1 October 1996.

On the bench are 21 Judges of different nationalities from all over the world. The Judges were elected among experts in the law of the sea, many of whom have been involved in negotiating the Convention. They were elected on 1 August 1996 by the hundred States that were parties to the Law of the Sea Convention on that day. One hundred and six States are at present party to the Convention, indicating the world wide approval which the Convention has obtained.

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