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Republic of the Congo
Unity - Work – Progress

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
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Report of the Republic of the Congo on the implementation of the draft resolution of the General Assembly entitled “Oceans and the law of the sea”

Introduction

Ocean space represents representing close to three quarters of the Earth’s surface area, covering 361.3 million km². The Pacific Ocean alone occupies 178.7 million km², accounting for half of the Earth’s water surface and 40 per cent of its surface area. The deep ocean floor represents about 80 per cent of the total seabed area and deep waters from continental margins. The average ocean depth is 3,700 metres.

The function of the world’s oceans as reservoirs of biological resources is now more vital than ever for sustaining human society. The oceans are also an exceptional reservoir of raw materials that should enable the world to deal with the relative scarcity of continental resources over the next few decades. They also serve as a still-not-fully-known biodiversity reservoir which could serve human society provided it is used prudently.

The General Assembly plays a strong and active role with regard to the law of the sea, thereby performing its function to progressively develop international law. The three successive conferences on the law of the sea – Geneva 1958, Geneva 1960 and the third, the sessions of which were held in New York, Caracas and Geneva, culminating in the Montego Bay Convention of 1982 – were all convened under the auspices of the General Assembly.

In its resolution 54/33 of 24 November 1999, the General Assembly decided to establish an open-ended informal consultative process on oceans and the law of the sea, referred to simply as “the consultative process. The Secretary-General now has the responsibility to submit to the Assembly an annual report on oceans and the law of the sea covering all aspects of the topic. The report provides the foundation for the Assembly’s discussions and the potential basis of new resolutions. According to the Commission on

Sustainable Development, which had proposed the establishment of the consultative process and the principle of such a report, the purpose of the report is to consider a number of issues, with an emphasis on “identifying areas where coordination and cooperation at the intergovernmental and inter-agency levels should be enhanced”. The first meeting of the consultative process was held in 2000 and the second in 2009.

As part of its contribution to the process, which was requested of Member States by the Secretary-General, the Congo has the honour to present information on the following:

- Challenges posed by marine debris, plastics and microplastics;
- Actions and activities that have been undertaken at the national and regional levels with regard to the provisions of General Assembly resolutions on oceans and the law of the sea;
- Further action to prevent and significantly reduce marine debris, plastics and microplastics.

(I) • Challenges posed by marine debris, plastics and microplastics

The Republic of the Congo covers an area of 342,000 km². It is located in Central Africa, straddling the equator between latitudes 3°30'N and 5°S, and longitudes 11° and 18°E. It is bounded on the west by Gabon, on the northeast by Cameroon, on the north by the Central African Republic, on the east and southeast by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and on the south by the Angolan enclave of Cabinda. The southwestern portion of the Congo has a shoreline of about 17,000 km², representing approximately 5 per cent of the country's total surface area.

Although a source of wealth, this massive shoreline is being threatened by marine pollution. The marine environment of the Congo is under attack from numerous sources of pollution, including:

- Pollution from hydrocarbons, consisting of acts of voluntary pollution from ships;
- Pollution from the dumping of debris: until recently, it was common practice for States to dump their hazardous products on the high-sea floor. Mud and debris from dredging activities are systematically dumped. Many ocean trenches – and even areas of the continental shelf – have become opaque dump sites for the world's unwanted debris.

(II) Actions and activities that have been undertaken at the national and regional levels with regard to the provisions of General Assembly resolutions on oceans and the law of the sea

The Republic of the Congo has taken action with regard to the provisions of General Assembly resolutions, including the following:

- Establishment in 2013 of a general inspectorate for the environment to combat pollution in all its forms;¹
- Tightening of the conditions governing the provision of services at sea for the removal or collection of operational debris and/or cargo residue from ships and platforms or other residue and/or depollution of the sea, basins and ports resulting from the discharge of hydrocarbons and other debris into maritime waters under Congolese jurisdiction;²
- Establishment in 2008 of a general inspectorate for maritime and port affairs;
- Ratification in 2013 of the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.³

(III) Further action to prevent and significantly reduce marine debris, plastics and microplastics

Discussions are being held with a view to adapting Congolese legislation to the specific issue of marine pollution. This will involve the adoption of legislation on marine pollution and the adaptation of environmental laws. The emphasis on sustainable development in the new constitutional framework provides an opportunity which the leaders will undoubtedly seize.

¹ Decree No. 2013-186 of 10 May 2013.

² Order No. 19031 of 31 December 2013.

³ Act No. 24-2013 of 11 October 2013.