

Statement to the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly
on the Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe Memorial Fellowship
6 November 2020

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea to provide you with an update on the implementation of the Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe (HSA) Memorial Fellowship on the Law of the Sea.

Capacity-building activities in the field of oceans and the law of the sea are one of the core mandates of the Secretary-General under relevant resolutions of the General Assembly. On numerous occasions, most recently in its resolution 74/19 of 20 December 2019, the General Assembly recognized, and expressed its appreciation for, the important contribution to the capacity-building of developing countries and the promotion of the law of the sea made by the HSA Memorial Fellowship.

Let me recall that the Fellowship was established in 1981 to assist government officials and other professionals from developing States to acquire additional knowledge on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, in order to promote its wider application, and to enhance specialized experience in maritime affairs and related disciplines.

As at November 2020, 33 fellows from 30 developing countries have completed the HSA Memorial Fellowship. Fifteen of the fellows are women and 18 are men. These professionals are now making important contributions in their respective countries and regions. Indeed, our office has seen many of them back in New York taking active roles on behalf of their States or other national and regional organisations in important fora and processes related to ocean affairs and the law of the sea. Most recently, one the 1994 fellows, Maurice Kengne Kamgue of Cameroon, was elected as a member of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

Regarding the 2020 fellowship: Ms. Linda Bana of Ghana was awarded that fellowship, however in the light of the impacts of the Coronavirus-19 pandemic, in particular international travel restrictions and preventive measures in New York, the 2020 HSA Fellowship was postponed tentatively to 2021, with the expectations that the situation would improve and allow the Division to implement it.

As stated in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on oceans and the law of the sea (A/75/340): "The need to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic has provided the international community with an opportunity to rebuild in a more resilient and sustainable manner. The response needs to address acute needs but should also herald a transition towards a human-centred, gender-responsive, inclusive and sustainable future. Fostering sustainable ocean-based economies offers significant opportunities to advance the sustainable development of States, in particular for least developed countries and small island developing States, in conjunction with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda". Therefore, it is now more than ever important for developing countries to build and maintain the capacity to advance their sustainable development in the context of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 14, and actively participate in ocean-related processes. The key to successfully doing so is a better understanding and effective implementation of international law of the sea, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, its two implementing Agreements and other related international instruments, the implementation of the commitments under the Paris Agreement, which noted the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, as well as the effective participation in the ongoing BBNJ IGC negotiations. Again, the needs are many and the challenges are plentiful.

It is therefore critical that awards under this Fellowship are implemented continuously and consistently, including so that States can plan accordingly for the application and eventual release of awardees. This, of course, requires continued and adequate funding. In this regard, I recall with regret that in the past, due to insufficient funds, no awards were made from 2007 to 2009, in 2014 and in 2016. In addition, owing to insufficient funds in 2017, only a partial

award was made. Such a situation should not repeat itself, especially taking into account the current emphasis on oceans and their future. While I am pleased to note that the current balance of the trust funds allows for the full implementation of the 2020 award and might carry the fellowship even through 2022, continued efforts are needed to provide for sustainable financing of this fellowship, small in size but large in its impact.

Let me recall that the General Assembly, in its resolution 74/19 on oceans and the law of the sea, urged States, and other relevant stakeholders to make voluntary financial contributions in support of the Fellowship, so that a regular award may be granted for 2020 and beyond.

With many thanks to States who have made the current and previous 33 fellowships possible, the Division echoes the call by the Assembly and strongly encourages voluntary contributions in support of future fellows. We remain available to address any question in this regard.

Thank you.