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The [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea](#) (UNCLOS), one of the most [significant](#) international legal instruments of our time, was adopted and opened for signature in Montego Bay, Jamaica, on 10 December 1982. It ushered in a transformation in the law of the sea, providing us with an overarching “

It is no overstatement to say that UNCLOS has contributed fundamentally to the maintenance of international peace and security globally, as well as to the conservation and sustainable use of our ocean. UNCLOS continues to be recognized by the [General Assembly](#) as setting out “the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out” and as being “of strategic importance as the basis for national, regional and global action and cooperation in the marine sector”.

There is much to celebrate on this fortieth anniversary of UNCLOS. At the same time, there is no doubt that our ocean is facing enormous challenges. The “[triple planetary crisis](#)” of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution is causing severe and unprecedented damage to this precious environment, on which the lives and livelihoods of so many depend. This reality should not be an invitation to turn away from UNCLOS, but rather to re-examine and re-embrace its fundamental tenets. The provisions of the Convention are of as much relevance today as they were in 1982, and continue to provide the bedrock for States to cooperate internationally to meet emerging challenges. Ongoing efforts towards the effective implementation of UNCLOS worldwide, together with related instruments, must therefore be a priority.




“The Convention’s fortieth anniversary is an important reminder to continue using this critical instrument to tackle today’s challenges.”

António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations

The [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea](#) (UNCLOS) was adopted in 1982 after almost a decade of negotiations. Those negotiations were [ambitious](#) in scope, and the resulting Convention was a truly [unprecedented](#) instrument, governing vast spatial areas and a multitude of ocean-related activities in a comprehensive manner. [It resolved long-standing debates on issues including the breadth of States' maritime entitlements, and contained important new developments.](#) However, acknowledging that some aspects of UNCLOS had prevented certain States from ratifying or acceding to it, consultations began in 1990 under the aegis of the Secretary-General on outstanding issues relating to the deep seabed mining provisions. These consultations eventually led to the [Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of UNCLOS](#), which cleared the way for the entry into force of UNCLOS in 1994 by facilitating the wider participation of major industrialized States. Indeed, UNCLOS has now been

This publication addresses the following themes as



Recognizing also the significant contribution of sustainable fisheries to food security and nutrition, income, wealth and poverty alleviation for present and future generations

(General Assembly resolution 76/71, preamble)

Global fisheries and aquaculture production is at a record high and the sector will play an increasingly important role in providing food and nutrition in the future, contributing to food security in all regions. Worldwide average apparent aquatic food consumption per capita has more than doubled since 1960 and is expected to continue to increase in the coming decades. In addition, it is estimated that about 600 million livelihoods, including those of subsistence and secondary sector workers and their dependants, largely in developing countries, depend at least partly on fisheries and aquaculture. Notably, while the role of women is often overlooked, they play an important role in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, with 1.2 billion women globally participating in small-scale fisheries alone.

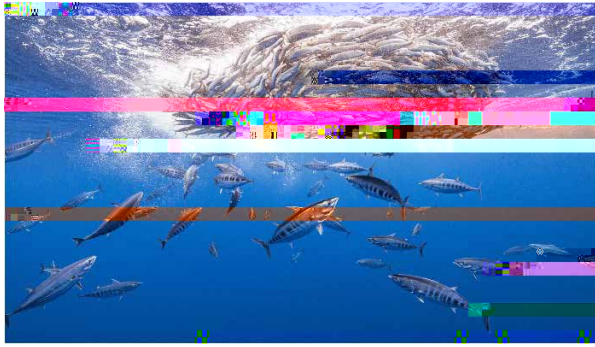



Photo: Hannes Klostermann, United Nations World Oceans Day photo competition, 2021.


It is widely accepted today that fisheries resources must be managed if their contribution to the nutritional, economic and social well-being of the world's growing population, as well as to ecosystem health and resilience, is to be sustained. However, for much of history, these resources were assumed to be infinite. Scientific and technological advances in the twentieth century facilitated the intensive development of fisheries and fishing fleets, which laid bare the fallacy of infinite living marine resources. As some major fish stocks collapsed globally, it became increasingly clear that fisheries resources could not sustain the rapid and often unfettered advances in fishing effort, and that new approaches to fisheries management

In addition, the [Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries](#) ¹ [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(FAO\)](#), the United Nations specialized agency that is responsible, inter alia, for matters relating to food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture, including fisheries. The Code lays out principles and standards to



Reaffirming the importance of the work of the International Seabed Authority (the Authority) in accordance with the Convention and the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 (the Part XI Agreement)

(General Assembly resolution 77/248, preamble)



Emphasizes once again the importance of the implementation of Part XII of the Convention in order to protect and preserve the marine environment and its living marine resources against pollution and physical degradation, and calls upon all States to cooperate and take measures consistent with the Convention, directly or through competent international organizations, for the protection and preservation of the marine environment

(General Assembly resolution 77/248, para. 203)

Marine and coastal ecosystems are **essential** to the well-being of humanity and to the planet as a whole, playing a key role in regulating our atmosphere, including providing much of the oxygen we breathe, and underpinning the rich biodiversity on which the health and resilience of marine ecosystems and the livelihoods of many depend. However, these ecosystems are under increasing pressure from human activities, including overutilization of marine living resources, greenhouse gas-induced climate change, destructive practices, invasive alien species and land-based sources of pollution. Taking care of our marine environment is therefore critical.



established in 1974, provides a successful frame-

IMO have been working since the mid-1990s on [preventing air pollution from ships](#). The Regulations for the Prevention of Air Pollution from Ships, known as MARPOL Annex VI, seek to minimize airborne emissions from ships and were complemented by mandatory technical and operational energy efficiency measures to significantly reduce CO² emissions, which entered into force on 1 January 2013. In addition, IMO has adopted an [initial strategy on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from ships](#), which envisages a reduction in total greenhouse gas emissions [għb °cīZg:Vi ṽcVāh] ēēc\ \Vh\Vi ṽVhi **%eZgXZci \Vh' ' %*%Xdb eVgZY1 4] * %%-!1] ṽ\Vi i] Z'hVb Z'ī'b Z' pursuing efforts to phase them out entirely.

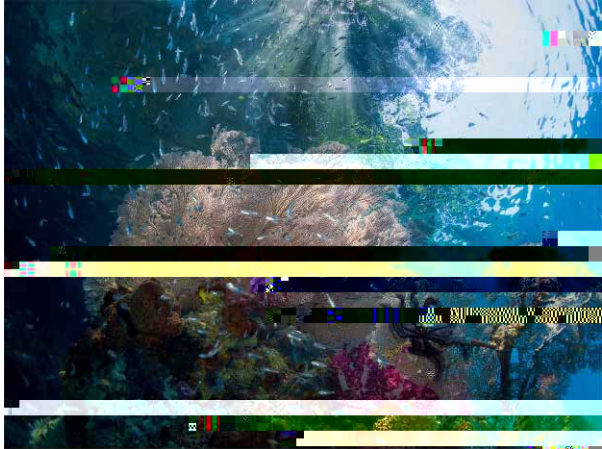



Photo: Kevin De Vree, United Nations World Oceans Day photo competition, 2021.

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Emphasizing that underwater archaeological, cultural and historical heritage, including shipwrecks and watercraft, holds essential




Shipping carries

on autonomous shipping is [planned](#) for adoption by 2024, with a mandatory code to follow by 2028.

Shipping plays a significant role in sustainable development, international trade and inclusive economic growth. By facilitating international trade in goods, including food, energy, raw materials, manufactured goods and medical supplies, providing employment

and supporting livelihoods, international shipping also underpins the achievement of many of the Sustainable Development Goals. UNCLOS and the shipping-related international legal instruments developed within its overall framework are therefore indispensable instruments on the journey towards sustainable development.

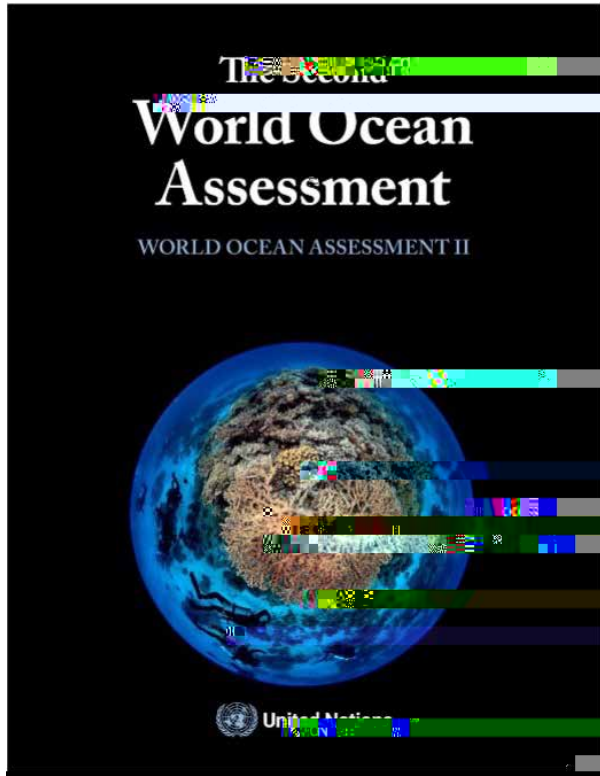


Recalling that marine science is important for eradicating poverty, contributing to food security, conserving the world's marine environment and resources, helping to understand, predict and respond to natural events and promoting the sustainable development of the oceans and seas, by improving knowledge, through sustained research efforts and the evaluation of monitoring results, and applying such knowledge to management and decision-making

(General Assembly resolution 77/248, preamble)


Despite covering more than 70 per cent of the Earth, the ocean is still largely unexplored and scientific knowledge of it is limited. Ocean science is, however, critical to making the best possible decisions to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and its resources. Deepening that understanding is therefore essential for sustainable development.

The fundamental role of science in ocean management, including by setting out a comprehensive framework for the conduct and promotion of marine scientific research, is recognized in UNCLOS. On



Notes with appreciation efforts and initiatives at the regional level, in various regions, to further the implementation of the Convention and to respond, including through capacity-building, to issues related to maritime safety and security, the conservation and sustainable use of living marine resources, the protection and preservation of the marine environment and the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity

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Emphasizes that capacity-building is essential to ensure that States, especially developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as well as coastal African States, are able to fully implement the Convention, benefit from the sustainable development of the oceans and seas and participate fully in global and regional forums on ocean affairs and the law of the sea

(General Assembly resolution 77/248, para. 11)

The full and effective implementation of the international law of the sea, as reflected in UNCLOS and related instruments, is dependent on States' capacity to meaningfully engage with the legal framework and effectively manage ocean spaces, resources and activities. It is also essential for States to achieve sustainable development, including meeting the ocean-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 14. However, capacity development in ocean affairs and the law of the sea remains a significant need for many developing States, in particular small island developing States and the least developed countries.

Capacity-building activities concerning UNCLOS (a) 5

discussed above



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