



The
Bahamas

**58TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

AGENDA ITEM 52(a): OCEANS AND THE LAW OF THE SEA

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Mr. President,

The Bahamas aligns itself with the statements made by the distinguished representatives of Morocco on behalf of the G-77 and China, and Jamaica on behalf of the Caribbean Community. We wish to offer a few additional comments from our own national perspective.

We would like to thank the Secretary General for his annual comprehensive report on this agenda item, contained in document A/58/65. We acknowledge that the Secretariat has a difficult task in meeting, among other restrictions, the stipulated page limits. We appreciate their very focused contribution to our work.

As an archipelago of some 700 islands, twenty-two of which are inhabited, maritime transport of goods and people has always been an essential part of Bahamian life. At the same time its geological structure as one of the world's largest areas of coral reef has ensured that the protection of the marine environment has been given a high priority. The Bahamas is committed to safe sea transport and the need for environmental protection, and it is in these areas that I would wish to focus my comments.

Mr. President,

For The Bahamas, cooperation and coordination are critical to the aims of safe maritime transport and the protection of our fragile maritime environment. As a reflection of my Government's commitment in these areas, The Bahamas has acceded to the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS), the major international Conventions administered by the IMO, the MARPOL Convention and the International Labour Organisation [ILO] Convention 147 dealing with Minimum Standards in Merchant Ships. Equally important, The Bahamas has steadily maintained active representation in all the Committees and Sub-Committees of the IMO.

The Bahamas has operated its ship registry since 1976, and there are now over 1400 ships worldwide registered under the Bahamian flag, totaling approximately 35 million gross tonnes. Accordingly, The Bahamas has the third largest ship register in the world, and is still growing, with a decreasing age profile of her ships. The Bahamas exercises utmost due diligence in this regard, and the Bahamas Maritime Authority has clear, well-defined policies regarding the de-listing of ships from The Bahamas register that do not meet national and international standards. The Bahamas Registry's port state control detention record remains well below industry average and has improved consistently each year.

Mr. President,

As a responsible member of the shipping community, The Bahamas has served on the Council of the IMO from 1991 – 1995 and again from 1999 to the present. The Bahamas has presented its candidature for re-election to the Council, under Category 'C', the elections for which would be held this week, on Friday, 28 November, during the IMO Assembly in London. The Bahamas is presently the sole Caribbean State

represented on the Council, and, as in previous years, our candidature has been endorsed by the Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

While on the Council, The Bahamas has engaged in constructive cooperation with fellow members towards the implementation of IMO resolutions and decisions and by submission of constructive forward- looking proposals to foster the Organisation's goal of maintaining the highest standards of maritime safety, efficiency of navigation, and protection of the marine environment. Examples of this cooperation and constructive engagement include a paper that has recently been submitted by The Bahamas regarding Places of Refuge, an issue of critical importance to enhancing maritime safety and cooperation between states engaged in various maritime activities.

Mr. President,

With regard to the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems, The Bahamas' exclusive fisheries zone covers some 260,000 square miles of islands, banks, reefs, shipping lanes and pelagic fisheries. Notably on the windward side of our islands are extensive fringing coral reefs. There are also considerable areas of patch reefs and sea grass beds to be found on the banks. Collectively, the shallow seas of The Bahamas provide the largest body of coral reef and other marine organisms in the Atlantic/Caribbean region. The Government of The Bahamas, having realized very early the importance of maintaining a healthy and vibrant marine ecosystem, has established five (5) marine protected areas throughout the archipelago, and has identified an additional eight (8) potential sites. In fact, Mr. President, the largest of the established marine protected areas, the Exuma land and sea park, was established as early as 1959, some 44 years ago.

The Bahamas is geographically located along the migratory route of a vast number of marine and terrestrial species. Humpback whales migrate from the north Atlantic, in the winter, to the southern end of our archipelago where they spawn. Other pelagic species move through our islands throughout the year.

Mr. President,

Tourism is our main industry, but tourism has not always been an environmentally friendly activity. Certain practices and behaviours have had a negative impact upon our fragile ecosystem. The challenge for The Bahamas, therefore, is to continue to develop our tourism product in an ecologically sensitive matter. Tourism thrives because of the natural beauty of the land, the sea and the marine life in our region. The Bahamas therefore, remains committed to ensuring the sustainability of that environment for its economic survival and social development. The establishment of the Sustainable Tourism Unit within the Ministry of Tourism is the driving force behind the development of a set of sustainable tourism policy guidelines and in conjunction with the Bahamas Environment Science and Technology Commission, much has been accomplished in raising the awareness of the importance of a clean and healthy environment for our people and those visitors who come to our shores.

Also, because international shipping lanes traverse our territorial waters, the potential for marine degradation is very high. The Bahamas will continue to take the necessary steps to ensure that vessels transiting our waters comply with international standards. In addition, The Bahamas continues to express its concern over the transport of nuclear waste and other hazardous materials through its waters, and indeed, the Caribbean Sea. We join other likeminded States in the call for the immediate cessation of such practices in order to prevent any occurrence of accidents that could seriously threaten the sustainable development of our country and the health of our people.

Mr. President,

The constraints faced by The Bahamas in its efforts to protect and maintain our vulnerable marine ecosystems are the same as those faced by every other small island developing states (SIDS), and indeed, other developing countries. These are, inadequate human, financial and technical resources and capabilities. In this regard, we continue to seek assistance in the area of capacity building. We are pleased that in adopting the resolution that is before us during this session, the Assembly would acknowledge the essential need for capacity-building to ensure that all States, in particular least developed countries and small island developing states, are able to both implement the UNCLOS and to benefit from the sustainable development of the oceans and the seas.

In conclusion, I would like to re-iterate that the Government of The Bahamas is strongly committed to cooperation and coordination with other States in the implementation of international regulations designed to ensure the safety of maritime activity and to protect the marine environment. In this context, The Bahamas actively participated in the fourth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, held in June of this year. We view the process as a means through which all States are able to engage in constructive dialogue and make concrete recommendations to achieve our common goals, and we look forward to the continued growth and increased benefit of this process.

thank you. Mr. President.