

President Ronald Reagan's Statement on United States Participation in the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea

January 29, 1982

The world's oceans are vital to the United States and other nations in diverse ways. They represent waterways and airways essential to preserving the peace and to trade and commerce, are major sources for meeting increasing world food and energy demands, and promise further resource potential. They are a frontier for expanding scientific research and knowledge, a fundamental part of the global environmental balance, and a great source of beauty, awe, and pleasure for mankind.

Developing international agreement for this vast ocean space, covering over half of the Earth's surface, has been a major challenge confronting the international community. Since 1973 scores of nations have been actively engaged in the arduous task of developing a comprehensive treaty for the world's oceans at the Third United Nations Conference on Law of the Sea. The United States has been a major participant in this process.

Serious questions had been raised in the United States about parts of the draft convention, and, last March, I announced that my administration would undertake a thorough review of the current draft and the degree to which it met United States interests in the navigation, overflight, fisheries, environmental, deep seabed mining, and other areas covered by that convention. We recognize that the last two sessions of the Conference have been difficult, pending the completion of our review. At the same time, we consider it important that a Law of the Sea treaty be such that the United States can join in and support it. Our review has concluded that while most provisions of the draft convention are acceptable and consistent with United States interests, some major elements of the deep seabed mining regime are not acceptable.

I am announcing today that the United States will return to those negotiations and work with other countries to achieve an acceptable treaty. In the deep seabed mining area, we will seek changes necessary to correct those unacceptable elements and to achieve the goal of a treaty that:

- will not deter development of any deep seabed mineral resources to meet national and world demand;
- will assure national access to these resources by current and future qualified entities to enhance U.S. security of supply, to avoid monopolization of the resources by the operating arm of the International Authority, and to promote the economic development of the resources;

- will provide a decisionmaking role in the deep seabed regime that fairly reflects and effectively protects the political and economic interests and financial contributions of participating states;
- will not allow for amendments to come into force without approval of the participating states, including in our case the advice and consent of the Senate;
- will not set other undesirable precedents for international organizations; and
- will be likely to receive the advice and consent of the Senate. In this regard, the convention should not contain provisions for the mandatory transfer of private technology and participation by and funding for national liberation movements.

The United States remains committed to the multilateral treaty process for reaching agreement on Law of the Sea. If working together at the Conference we can find ways to fulfill these key objectives, my administration will support ratification.

I have instructed the Secretary of State and my Special Representative for the Law of the Sea Conference, in coordination with other responsible agencies, to embark immediately on the necessary consultations with other countries and to undertake further preparations for our participation in the Conference.