



**INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL FOR THE LAW OF THE SEA  
TRIBUNAL INTERNATIONAL DU DROIT DE LA MER**

# **Press Release**

(Issued by the Registry)

**ELECTION OF MR. GRITAKUMAR CHITTY AS THE FIRST REGISTRAR OF  
THE INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL FOR THE LAW OF THE SEA**

HAMBURG, 21 October. Today, the Judges of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea elected Mr. Gritakumar E. Chitty, of Sri Lankan nationality, as the first Registrar of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

Mr. Chitty, who has over 20 years of experience in the United Nations Secretariat, has been involved in the establishment of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea from the very beginning. Mr. Chitty, in his function as Director-in-Charge, was responsible for setting up the Registry of the Tribunal. The Registry and the United Nations Secretariat organized the ceremonial inauguration of the Judges of the Law of the Sea Tribunal last Friday, 18 October. On this occasion high dignitaries from all over the world were present in Hamburg, the seat of the Tribunal, to witness the swearing in of the Judges.

Mr. Chitty began his legal career in private national law practice and joined the United Nations in 1975 when he became the Special Assistant of the Under-Secretary-General for the Law of the Sea, Mr. Bernardo Zuleta. In his long-standing career with the United Nations, Mr. Chitty was the officer responsible for the subject of the settlement of disputes under the law of the sea continuously from 1975, the first time the topic was taken up by the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea. In May 1995, Mr. Chitty was appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations as the Officer responsible for making preparations for the establishment of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea which was followed by his appointment as Director-in-Charge of the Registry of the Tribunal in August 1996.

The Registrar of the Tribunal is elected for a term of seven years among candidates proposed by the Members of the Tribunal. For the duration of that period he is in charge of the Registry, which is the administrative organ of the Tribunal. The Registrar is responsible for all departments of the Registry. The Staff is under his control and he directs the work of the Registry, of which he is the Head. The Registrar's post is at the level of Assistant Secretary-General.

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### **The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea**

The Judges were first convened and held their first meeting on 1 October. This was the start of their work devoted to organizational matters. The Judges elected Judge Thomas A. Mensah from Ghana to serve as the first President of the Tribunal. Judge Rüdiger Wolfrum, a German national, was elected Vice-President.

The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea has been established pursuant to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This Convention is one of the most comprehensive international treaties ever completed. It provides for the outer limits to which coastal States can claim jurisdiction in their adjacent waters, and regulates prominent issues such as fisheries, navigation and the prevention of pollution of the marine environment. The Convention also pronounces the deep seabed as the common heritage of mankind and sets up the International Seabed Authority to regulate the exploitation of the deep seabed.

The Convention on the Law of the Sea is unique in that the mechanism for the settlement of disputes is incorporated into the document, making it obligatory for parties to the Convention to go through the settlement procedure in case of a dispute with another party. The Tribunal is the central forum for the settlement of disputes arising from the Convention. At present, one hundred and seven States are party to the Convention, indicating the world wide approval which the Convention has obtained. The Convention gives the Tribunal jurisdiction to resolve a variety of international disputes. Disputes that can be referred to the Tribunal may involve *inter alia* the delimitation of maritime zones, fisheries, navigation and ocean pollution. States parties to the Convention can bring their disputes for resolution to the Tribunal. In addition, the Tribunal can resolve disputes amongst States, the International Seabed Authority, companies and private individuals, arising out of the exploitation of the deep seabed. The Tribunal also has compulsory jurisdiction over the prompt release, upon the deposit of a bond, of arrested vessels and their crews. Furthermore, the International Seabed Authority may request legal opinions, advisory opinions, from the Tribunal.

The City of Hamburg, with its rich maritime history as part of the League of Hanseatic Cities, obtained the seat of the Tribunal during the negotiation of the Convention which was signed in 1982. The temporary building, situated at Wexstrasse in the centre of Hamburg, opened on 1 October 1996.

### **The Judges**

On the bench are 21 Judges from all over the world. The Judges were elected among experts in the law of the sea, many of whom were involved in negotiating the Convention. They were elected on 1 August 1996 by the States that were parties to the Law of the Sea Convention on that day.

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**For information media -- not an official record**