



With breaking stories and
newswire products from

UN NEWS CENTRE



UN official stresses importance of ocean treaty in governing use of seas



Patricia O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

13 March 2012 –

The United Nations legal chief has stressed the importance of the global treaty governing the use of oceans and their resources and urged States that have not ratified it to do so this year, which marks the 30th anniversary of the opening for signature of the convention.

The Convention on the Law of the Sea that governs all aspects of ocean space, from delimitation of maritime boundaries, environmental regulations, scientific research, commerce and the settlement of international disputes involving marine issues, entered into force on 16 November 1994 after Guyana became the 60th State to ratify it.

“The Convention is definitely holding out the promise of an orderly and equitable regime or system to govern all uses of the sea,” said Patricia O’Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and UN Legal Counsel.

“But it is a club that one must join in order to fully share in the benefits,” she said in an interview. “The Convention – like other treaties – creates only rights for those who become parties to it and thereby accept its obligations, except for the provisions which apply to all States because they either merely confirm existing customary norms or are becoming customary law.

“The Convention starts from the premise that that problems of ocean space are closely interrelated and need to be considered as a whole,” she added.

[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon this month sent letters to the 34 UN Member States that have not yet ratified the treaty, urging them to join.

Parties to the Convention, which currently number 162, are obliged to protect and preserve the marine environment. They are required to cooperate on a regional and global basis to formulate rules and standards related to the use of the seas.

One of the salient features of the Convention is the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) that recognizes the right of coastal States to have jurisdiction and the right to exploit, develop, manage and conserve all resources in the waters, on the ocean floor and in the subsoil of an area extending 200 miles from shore.

Under the Convention, all States have the right to navigation, over-flight, scientific research and fishing on the high seas, but they are obliged to cooperate with other States in adopting measures to manage living resources.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

[Countries adopt UN-backed declaration to protect marine environment](#)