30th Anniversary Commemorative Ceremony for the

International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea

25 September 2026

ADDRESS by Dr Johannes Dimroth, Deputy State Secretary,

Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection

Mr President Heidar, Mr President Iwasawa and Senator Gallina, liebe Anna,

Distinguished Judges,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to take part in this 30th anniversary ceremony. On behalf of the Federal Government of Germany, may I congratulate the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on reaching this impressive milestone. Along with these congratulations to the Tribunal, I would like to express my gratitude to the President and the staff of the Court who organized this impressive event that we can enjoy together today.

Thirty years ago, on 1 October 1996, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea held its constitutive session. Germany was proud and honoured when it was decided to establish the Tribunal here in Hamburg, a place with such a rich maritime tradition.

There are cities that lie by the sea. And then there is Hamburg.

Hamburg does not simply happen to be situated on the River Elbe — for centuries, Hamburg has thought of itself through the water. From the port to the Speicherstadt and the great shipyards, water here has never been merely scenery. It has been a livelihood, a highway — and, from time to time, a rather emphatic reminder that, in the end, nature tends to have the final word.

So if one is looking for a place from which to adjudicate the law of the sea, Hamburg is a rather natural choice. This is a city that understands what a port means: that people, goods, interests and legal systems from all over the world come together — and that, amid all this traffic, it is quite useful to have someone in charge of navigation.

Perhaps this also explains something of the Hanseatic temperament. One does not become alarmed at every wave. One looks at the situation, checks the chart, and then — preferably without too much fuss — decides what needs to be done.

For an international court, that is not a bad starting point. The law of the sea, too, has its tides, its shoals and, occasionally, some rather high waves. What matters is that, in the end, the course is true.

And where better to remember this than here, between the Elbe and the Alster, in a city that has known for centuries that on water, one can travel a long way — but without rules, one does not necessarily get very far.

Ladies and Gentleman, I suspect we all can agree that the Tribunal has found a home that reflects its significance here on the River Elbe.

We are gathered here in the new courtroom, which we recently renovated to fulfil the technical needs of this important tribunal. Imposing yet state-of-the art, this space reflects both the standing and history, and the outlook, of the Tribunal.

Germany has always been committed to its role as host country, and we fully recognise the Tribunal’s immense importance for the peaceful settlement of disputes and for the international community as a whole. Today, I may reiterate our unwavering support for the work of the Tribunal.

The Tribunal was established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which is one of the most comprehensive multilateral agreements ever concluded. Its 320 articles cover a wide range of marine and maritime activities, and the text remains amazingly up-to-date in an era of new developments in marine research, protection and exploitation. The Convention has been ratified by 172 States Parties, giving it near universal status. A tribunal to resolve disputes concerning the interpretation or application of the Convention is an essential part of the Convention system.

At the same time, the significance of the Tribunal goes far beyond its mandate to settle maritime disputes: the Tribunal is part of the international legal order created by the international community of states. As we all know, that rules-based international order has come under severe pressure in recent times. Increasingly, powerful states are withdrawing support for independent international institutions. Those states are seeking to replace the rules-based international order with the law of economic and military power.

The Tribunal for the Law of the Sea may not currently be a target, but it is by no means invulnerable. Matters dealt with by the Tribunal go far beyond purely technical matters: indeed, the Tribunal rules on cases of great legal, economic and political significance.

Its decisions address current political developments and global issues that can rapidly become controversial – think of the Advisory Opinion on Climate Change. The very nature of the Tribunal's work, therefore, has the potential to make it politically unpopular and result in efforts to silence it. This is why we must see the Tribunal for the Law of the Sea alongside other international courts that face such threats and challenges.

The overall system of international jurisdiction as an expression of a rule-based international order must be protected and defended. For, ultimately, the international courts protect nothing less than the guarantee that all states – regardless of their size and power – can rely on, and are subject to, the same rules. And that is why, in turn, the international courts deserve OUR protection as governments. This explicitly includes, in particular, the International Criminal

Court, ladies and gentleman.

The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea is part of this system, which the Federal Government is committed to defending and upholding.

On that note, may I extend my best wishes to the Tribunal for the next 30 years of its important work here in Hamburg.

Thank you very much.