

The Bureau provides a general advisory service to the Government on international law, as it now exists, including advice on international agreements to which Canada is a party or in which there is a Canadian interest.

Of increasing importance in current relations among states are the numerous international meetings held to codify existing law or formulate new law in areas previously not subject to it. The Bureau acts as the operational arm of the Government in the development and maintenance of international law.

Law of the sea

In an attempt to accelerate the preparation of a comprehensive treaty to regulate the future use of the oceans, the Third United Nations Law of the Sea Conference held two sessions in New York during 1976, a spring session from March 15 to May 7 and a summer session from August 1 to September 17. Although considerable progress was achieved during the spring session, the summer session failed to live up to expectations; resolution of the more contentious issues, particularly the regime to apply in the deep seabed area, still eluded the delegates.

The New York spring session had before it the "single negotiating text" (SNT) in three parts that was issued on the last day of the 1975 Geneva session, as well as a text on dispute-settlement procedures prepared by the conference president on his own initiative and issued in July 1975. These texts consisted of some 300 articles, as well as appendices, which for the first time attempted to provide formulations for the resolution of complex and interrelated problems. Delegations had not been in a position to comment on the texts themselves before the opening of the spring session, and it was therefore decided that the three main committees would review their respective parts of the SNT in order to produce a "revised single negotiating text" (RSNT), while the president's text on settlement of disputes would be the object of a general discussion in plenary sessions of the conference in order to bring it into line with the other parts of the SNT. Although it had been hoped

that this reviewing process would be over by mid-session, the RSNT was issued only on the last day of the 1976 spring session with a new, unrevised text on the settlement of disputes. The slow rate of progress was inevitable in view of the sheer range and complexity of the issues, the different methods of work adopted by each committee and the number of informal negotiating groups set up to deal with the various issues.

Part One of the RSNT, which deals with the regime of exploitation of the resources of the "international seabed area" beyond national jurisdiction, was substantially modified, in comparison with the Geneva text, in an attempt to strike a more equitable balance between the views of the industrialized states and those of the developing countries. Part Two of the RSNT, dealing with the more "traditional" law-of-the-sea questions (territorial sea, international straits, fisheries, continental shelf, etc.) and with the new conception of the 200-mile economic zone, emerged virtually intact in its revised version, despite the campaign led by the group of landlocked and geographically-disadvantaged states for the recognition of special rights or privileges of transit through the territory and in the economic zones of neighbouring coastal states. Finally, Part Three of the RSNT, concerning the protection of the marine environment, marine scientific research and the transfer of technology, was considerably improved, particularly in providing more adequately for coastal-state jurisdiction over the control and prevention of pollution by ships. A new article on "ice-covered areas" also gave a measure of international sanction to Canada's 1970 Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act. On the issue of marine scientific research, the RSNT embodied what was hoped would be a workable compromise by coupling a coastal-state-consent regime with the stipulation that such consent should not be unreasonably withheld. In addition to the first three parts of the RSNT, the spring session also produced a fourth part, covering the settlement of disputes, which provided for a choice by parties to a dispute of one or more of four optional