

INTRODUCTION

The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea is the central judicial forum in the comprehensive system for the settlement of disputes established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982.^{1/} The historical background of the adoption of the Convention and of the establishment of the Tribunal is elaborated in the Introduction of the Tribunal's *Yearbook 1996–1997*.

The Tribunal is composed of 21 judges who are elected by the States Parties to the Convention. The first election took place on 1 August 1996 and the Tribunal began its work on 1 October 1996. On 28 October 1997 the Tribunal adopted its Rules and on 13 November 1997 it received its first case.

In 2000, the Tribunal dealt with two prompt release proceedings: on 7 February 2000, the Tribunal delivered its Judgment in the “*Camouco*” Case (*Panama v. France*) and on 18 December 2000, it delivered its Judgment in the “*Monte Confurco*” Case (*Seychelles v. France*). In addition, by Order dated 20 December 2000, the Tribunal, pursuant to the request of Chile and the European Community, formed a special chamber of five judges in accordance with article 15, paragraph 2, of the Statute to deal with the *Case concerning the Conservation and Sustainable Exploitation of Swordfish Stocks in the South-Eastern Pacific Ocean (Chile/European Community)*.

The Tribunal held two sessions devoted to administrative matters in 2000. The Ninth Session took place from 6 to 17 March 2000. The Tenth Session was held from 18 to 29 September 2000.

^{1/} The Convention entered into force on 16 November 1994.