

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 1982.¹⁷ 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 2001, the Tribunal dealt with four cases. In the *Case concerning the Conservation and Sustainable Exploitation of Swordfish Stocks in the South-Eastern Pacific Ocean (Chile/European Community)*, the President of the Special Chamber formed to deal with the case, by an Order dated 15 March 2001, extended the time-limit for making preliminary objections. On 20 April 2001, the Tribunal delivered its Judgment in the "*Grand Prince*" Case (*Belize v. France*), *Prompt Release*. Following an agreement between the parties, the proceedings in the "*Chaisiri Reefer 2*" Case (*Panama v. Yemen*), *Prompt Release*, were discontinued by an Order of the President of the Tribunal dated 13 July 2001. On 3 December 2001, the Tribunal delivered an Order prescribing provisional measures in the *MOX Plant Case (Ireland v. United Kingdom)*, *Provisional Measures*.

The Tribunal held two sessions devoted to administrative matters in 2001. The Eleventh Session took place from 5 to 16 March 2001. The Twelfth Session was held from 17 to 28 September 2001.

¹⁷ The Convention entered into force on 16 November 1994.