

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 Statute of the Tribunal is contained in Annex VI to the Convention. The historical background of the adoption of the Convention and of the establishment of the Tribunal is elaborated in the Introduction to the Tribunal's *Yearbook 1996–1997*.

The Tribunal is composed of 21 independent members, “elected from among persons enjoying the highest reputation for fairness and integrity and of recognized competence in the field of the law of the sea” (Statute, article 2, paragraph 1). The first election took place on 1 August 1996 and the Tribunal began its work on 1 October 1996.

In 2004, one case was submitted to the Tribunal. On 18 December 2004, the Tribunal delivered its Judgment in the “*Juno Trader*” Case (*Saint Vincent and the Grenadines v. Guinea-Bissau*), *Prompt Release*.

The Tribunal held two sessions devoted to legal and administrative matters in 2004. The Seventeenth Session took place from 22 March to 2 April 2004. The Eighteenth Session was held from 20 September to 1 October 2004.

¹ The Convention entered into force on 16 November 1994.