

Index to The Tommy Koh Law of the Sea Collection

Introduction

In 2011, Prof. Tommy Koh donated to the ISEAS Library an extensive collection of his private papers which was accumulated over the years when he represented Singapore at the United Nations and in Washington, and subsequently. Donations by Prof Koh have continued since then, and the collection has grown to include Prof Koh's book collection, photographs and medal awards. In view of the significance of Prof Koh's private papers, the Library has decided to devote a substantial amount of resources to re-arrange, describe and digitise the papers as part of the ISEAS Library's conservation and preservation efforts. Among the papers amassed through the multiple roles Prof Koh undertook in his illustrious diplomatic career and public service is a collection from his work at the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of The Sea (UNCLOS III) which is featured in this e-catalogue.

This collection is a most significant one, revealing the depth of Prof Koh's involvement in UNCLOS III from the start of its formal negotiation in 1974 till the momentous signing of the treaty in 1982. He was the chairman of a key negotiation committee that dealt with the financial arrangements for seabed mining in UNCLOS III in 1978, and was described in a New Yorker magazine article as "one of the most often consulted and most hardworking men at the conference; some delegates considered him its most brilliant member The major issues in these negotiations, which had once inflamed the Seventy-seven and the mining corporations equally, had simmered down since Koh took over." [] Prof Koh was subsequently elected the President of the Conference, a post he held from 1981 to 1982

Prof Koh's adeptness at helming the Conference to produce the Law of the Sea treaty signed by more than 100 nations not only placed Singapore on the international map but also paved the way for his appointments in other major international negotiations, including as the Singapore Agent at the International Court of Justice in the proceedings in 2007 over the Pedra Branca dispute. Among the many accolades he received was the 2014 Great Negotiator[2], an award given out by the Program on Negotiation, an inter-university collaboration between Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard Kennedy School.

The objective of UNCLOS III was to draft a comprehensive Law of the Sea Treaty that covered every aspect of ocean activity. Its first session was convened in 1973 and was concluded in 1982 after nine years of negotiations and working through a complex agenda covering over 25 subjects and issues, ranging from the exploration and exploitation of the international area, straits used for international navigation, exclusive economic zone, landlocked and geographically disadvantaged states to the protection of the marine environment and marine scientific research. On 10 December 1982 when the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea was opened for signing, 117 countries and two non-self-governing states signed the treaty, which was eventually ratified by 165 nations.

The documents in this collection are arranged in 15 groups. Group 1 to Group 9 are grouped according to the original file arrangement at the time of the record transfer to the ISEAS Library and each group is named according to the original file reference name. The documents in Group 10 to Group 15 have been arranged and grouped according to the record types as reflected in the titles of these groups.

Click the link to view the content descriptions for each group.

Group No	Record Group Title	Period
Group 1	UNCLOS III Conference Documents	1973-1982
Group 2	Post-UNCLOS III	1974-1989
Group 3	UNCLOS Reference Materials	1952-1987
Group 4	LOS UN.F.	1973-1987
Group 5	LOS.R.	1973-1998
Group 6	LOS.P.	1982-1995
Group 7	LOS.J.	1971-1995
Group 8	LOS.M.	1974-1991
Group 9	LOS.B.	1972-1993
Group 10	Seminar Papers	1976-1991
Group 11	Miscellaneous Documents	1962-1998
Group 12	Personal Notes	1977-1982
Group 13	Lecture Notes and Speeches	1979-2012
Group 14	Correspondences, Notes & UN Press Releases	1970-1992
Group 15	News Articles	1970-1984

[1] Wertenbaker, William. (1983, 1 August). A Reporter-At-Large – The Law of the Sea I. *The New Yorker*, 62.

[2] Sebenius, James K. & Green, Laurence A. "Tommy Koh: Background and Major Accomplishments of the Great Negotiator, 2014". <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/tommy-koh-background-and-major-accomplishments-of-the-great-negotiator-2014>. Accessed 15 April 2019.