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A New Strategic Programme to Strengthen Coastal and Marine Protection in the Western Indian Ocean under Discussion in Mombasa

Nairobi, 9 December 2009 - The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) today in Mombasa launched discussions on strengthened environmental protection measures that would be implemented through the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) to protect the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), a hotspot for biodiversity that also supports large coastal populations.

Formulated under the Nairobi Convention, the SAP, acting as a road map for the protection of the coastal and marine environment of the Western Indian Ocean (WIO-LaB), will establish a new regional legal instrument for the sound protection of the marine and coastal environment from land-based Sources and activities.

“The management of coral reefs, mangroves, and the beautiful beaches together with the rich biodiversity associated with these habitats in Eastern and Southern Africa, including the Island States in the Western Indian Ocean, must be protected if we are to preserve a way of life that is fast disappearing,” said Dixon Waruinge of the Joint Secretariat for the Nairobi and Abidjan Conventions at the meeting which will last until 11 December.

Over 60 million people in eastern and southern Africa live and depend on this coastal economy. The estimated economic value in the form of goods and services provided by coastal habitats such as coastal and mangrove forests, coral reefs and seagrass beds is over US\$25 billion per year. However, rapid population growth, increased resource exploitation, unplanned development and climate change is rapidly destroying and/or degrading this invaluable coastal and marine resource base.

As part of UNEP's effort to demonstrate that it is possible to reverse degradation of the coastal and marine environment, several demonstration projects were initiated and implemented throughout the region. These focused on the implementation of cost effective solutions to waste management (solid waste, municipal wastewater, etc) and community participation in resource management, ecotourism, coastal ecosystem management and restoration.

In Kenya, Seychelles and Tanzania, for example, UNEP supported the implementation of a demonstration project focused on the application of constructed wetland technology in wastewater treatment -- a cost effective and cheap solution to the ever growing problem of wastewater management in developing countries.

In Mozambique, the project focused on the demonstration of community-based approaches for mangrove reforestation and the development of alternative livelihoods in order to ease pressure on the exploitation of coastal natural resources. Other demonstration projects have been implemented in Comoros, Mauritius and Madagascar.

Through the SAP, cost-effective and sustainable technologies and approaches for wastewater management/treatment (pollution control) include coastal and marine resources utilization and management

promoted through implementation of nine demonstration projects in countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, including the island states.

As a result of the awareness created at both national and regional level on the dangers of degrading or polluting activities based on land, Governments in the Western Indian Ocean are increasingly integrating coastal and marine issues into their planning and national development processes.

“These pilot show that governments themselves are looking for solutions to effectively manage and protect the marine environment. The projects are not only transforming the way coastal and marine issues are tackled at both local and regional level, but are also yielding important regional and global environmental benefits,” said Mr. Waruinge.

There are plans for replication in order to create greater impact at both national and regional levels. Also, ministries, departments and special units have been established to specifically focus on coastal and marine environment issues, as demonstrated in the recent creation of the Ministry of Fisheries Development in Kenya which has now delivered a fisheries and oceans management policy for the country. In addition, the establishment of the Kenya Maritime Authority, and strengthening of the Freshwater, Marine and Coastal Unit of the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) of Kenya are other good examples.

The project “Addressing Land-based Activities in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO-LaB)” highlights some of the main environmental issues related to the degradation of the marine and coastal environment resulting from land-based sources and activities (LBSA) in eight countries in the WIO Region (Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, Seychelles, Comoros, Madagascar and Mauritius). It is financed by the Global Environment Fund and Norway (US\$ 8 million) and US\$3 million from UNEP and participating countries in cash and in kind.

Note to editors:

The seventh meeting of the Steering Committee of the WIO-LaB Project, looking to adopt the SAP, and the meeting of the National Focal Points to the Nairobi Convention, which kicked off today in Mombasa, Kenya, are part of the preparatory process towards the Sixth Conference of the Parties to the Nairobi Convention, to be held from 29th March to 2nd April 2010 in Nairobi. The two meetings are taking place from 7-11 December 2009.

The Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Eastern African Region (the Nairobi Convention), which has been in force since 30 May 1996, consists of 10 countries sharing the Western Indian Ocean Region. These include Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Somalia, Comoros, Mauritius, Seychelles, Reunion, Madagascar and South Africa.

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