

**Speech of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme to the
Joint Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Abidjan Convention and the
Nairobi Convention**

Johannesburg, South Africa, 5 – 8 November 2007

Excellencies, Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to address this joint meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Abidjan Convention and the Nairobi Convention.

Thank you too to the Government of South Africa and its people for their hospitality and excellent arrangements as hosts.

Thanks also to the Chairpersons of the Bureaus of the Abidjan and Nairobi Conventions for their guidance and leadership. The Bureau has always been there for the Secretariat and I thank them for their support.

Ladies and gentlemen, we meet here in Johannesburg in a world where the environment may have finally been understood not as a peripheral interest for those with time on their hands or an obsession with a niche interest.

But as a fundamental basis for stability in rapidly changing world and for much of the economic activity that supports developing and developed countries alike.

It is perhaps through the lens of climate change that the world is uniting around the notion of environment for development and the impact that unsustainable activities are having on the Earth's economically central life support systems including the marine environment.

The awareness has been led by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—its more than 2,000 scientists have now validated climate change as a scientific fact.

This year the IPCC, jointly established by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organisation, says the evidence in 2007 is “unequivocal”.

The likely impacts, from the melting away of glaciers and thus water supplies in the Himalayas to the Rocky Mountains and the threats to perhaps up to a third of Africa's coastal infrastructure, have also been brought into sharp focus by the IPCC this year—impacts many of which are likely not in some far distant future but in the life time of many in this room.

Yet the IPCC has also provided us with another reality—namely that the costs of combating climate change will be lower if we act now than if we wait—and that those 'early action' costs are perhaps as little as 0.1 per cent of global GDP over 30 years.

Climate change is the most clear challenge of this generation—a transition to a low carbon economy will be UNEP's over-arching message in Bali at the forthcoming climate convention meeting in December when government's really must get down to negotiating a post 2012 emissions reduction treaty.

A low carbon economy should not be just a goal for developed nations—the countries most responsible for climate change.

It should be a demand of developing ones too—why should the countries of Africa have access only to 20th if not 19th century energy generation and energy efficient systems when there are emerging, cost effect and cleaner or renewable energies?

Adaptation to climate change—climate proofing economies—is about access to modern energy systems as much as it is about capacity building in terms of agriculture, or health or infrastructure.

Today at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, UNEP with funding from the Global Environment Facility, the African Development Bank and industry, we are launching initiatives totalling close to \$100 million to generate electricity from sugar wastes and small-scale hydro in East and Southern Africa's tea industry.

Millions of farmers and thousands of communities stand to benefit from the availability of cheaper and greener power—especially in rural areas—industry stands to benefit from lower fuel costs—the global environment will benefit from reduced emissions as will forests from the anticipated reductions in the need for fuel-wood.

Climate change is certainly the most pressing and high profile concern of the here and now.

And the science continues to pour forth with new and important implications for terrestrial but also marine ecosystems--from the acidification of the oceans, and the possibility that this could interfere with the calcium-making mechanisms of economically important shellfish to coral reefs, to dramatic shifts in the currents that moderate climate and play key roles in the health and location of fish stocks.

In two days time, UNEP will hold a meeting of experts and government officials on the issue of mercury—the highly poisonous heavy metal.

There is now emerging concern that old deposits and new sources of mercury are emerging from sediments in lakes warming as a result of climate change.

Concern also emerging that the accelerated melting of ice in the Arctic is bringing mercury locked away back into circulation in the world's oceans and from there into the food marine food chain.

Significant new sources of mercury are also entering the global environment as a result off increased coal burning in Asia and other rapidly developing economies—again addressing climate change has wider benefits in terms of both the terrestrial but also the marine environment.

Ladies and gentlemen, perhaps I am dwelling too much on climate change and perhaps ignoring the two conventions at the heart of today's meeting.

But if there is one thing that climate change teaches us, it is the 'interlinkages' –to use the jargon—between so many areas that perhaps in the past seemed disconnected—interlinkages that perhaps also have resonance with the Nairobi and Abidjan Conventions and their links with other multilateral environmental agreements.

This is a point clearly brought into sharp relief by UNEP's latest flagship report, the Global Environment Outlook-4 launched last month including here in South Africa.

GEO-4 underlines not only the fact that the over-exploitation of the Earth's nature based and natural resources is reaching several real crisis points.

But is also salt and peppered with inspiring and shining examples of actions taken across the world to more intelligently manage economically important ecosystems--Fiji's decision to establish no take marine zones, leading to a 250 per cent increase in lobster catches, springs to mind.

However, GEO-4 also underlines that the scale and pace of the response is failing to match the magnitude and the speed of the challenges.

GEO-4 also points out that, albeit unevenly shared, the world is around a third richer than 20 years ago and that the international community has rolled out a great deal of multilateral environmental agreements.

But that these, ranging from climate and biodiversity to desertification and migratory species, remain to a greater or lesser extent underutilized and often under-funded.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Abidjan and Nairobi Conventions are part of this success story but also part of this, may one say, frustrating landscape of a less than substantial response to persistent and merging challenges.

This is why this joint meeting of the Conference of the Parties is so crucial—we need to re-discover the *raison d'être* as to why they were established in the first place and give them all the necessary scientific, political and financial backing so they can realize their extraordinary potential.

Some of that potential has been realized already.

In 1998 in Cape Town governments endorsed the Cape Town Declaration which led to the African Process to strengthen these two conventions.

Just last week, UNEP held its 9th Global Meeting of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Jeddah Declaration underlines that the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans are increasingly concerned about many emerging issues from climate change to deep sea biodiversity and sustainable management of the high seas.

Likewise, the meeting concluded that the continued decline in marine and coastal ecosystems services can no longer be seen purely from an environmental perspective as it has deep consequences on the socio-economic development of countries. It is in this recognition that the Global Strategic Directions for the Regional Seas (2008-2012) were adopted.

In the last eight years, these two conventions have—in partnership with organizations including UNEP, UNDP and UNIDO and often with Global Environment Facility-funding—assisted in establishing the--

- Western Indian Ocean Land Based Activities (WIO-LaB) project, South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Project and the Agulhas Somali Large Marine Ecosystem project under the Nairobi Convention. The total budget for these projects is over US\$75 million to be spent in the next five years;
- The ongoing Guinea Current, Canary Current and Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem projects in the Abidjan Convention area have a total budget of over US\$80 million in both in-kind and cash contribution.
- Under the Nairobi Convention, the “Consortium for Conservation of Coastal and Marine Ecosystems in the Western Indian Ocean” has been established.
- The consortium, referred to as the “WIO-C”, is a partnership between major NGOs and other organisations in the Western Indian Ocean. It is designed to improve information exchange, synergy and coordination between NGOs working on coastal and marine environment issues in the Western Indian Ocean region, and to move towards a joint programmatic approach in addressing these issues.

- Under the Abidjan Convention, UNEP is building partnerships with the Regional Programme for the Conservation of the Coastal and Marine Zones of West Africa (PRCM). The PRCM is a partnership between IUCN, WWF and Wetlands International. Increasingly, these partnerships are being linked to the Large Marine Ecosystems (LME) projects and the newly established interim Benguela and Guinea Current commissions.
- With support from the GEF and the UNEP Global Programme of Action (GPA), both Conventions have developed new protocols on land-based activities and sources of pollution. These protocols have been developed in partnership with UNIDO and UNDP through GCLME project (for the Abidjan Convention) and WIO-LaB project (for the Nairobi Convention).
- UNEP has also moved forward to strengthen the regional coordination mechanisms of the Abidjan Convention. UNEP has appointed a full time senior staff member to support the Abidjan Convention Secretariat. The Secretariat has also taken steps to strengthen the role of National Focal Points in the implementation of the work programmes of both the conventions for 2008 -2012.
- UNEP has supported 18 countries to help the National Focal Points to initiate compilation of national status reports on the coastal and marine environment. These reports will lay the basis for an effective and continuous reporting mechanism for the Conventions to support the prioritisation process and implementation of the Conventions, and will assist Contracting Parties to meet their reporting obligations.

I am happy to note that all the countries that signed the Nairobi Convention have ratified the Convention. We are also happy to welcome Liberia and Sierra Leone to this meeting. Both countries ratified the Abidjan Convention in 2005—bringing the total to 14. One way of strengthening the agreement will be ratification by more countries

Ladies and gentlemen, what of the future?

If we are to truly rise to the challenge of more intelligently managing the planet's natural and nature-based resources, we need to strive ever harder to put the environment in the centre of government policy—policy that cuts across all ministries.

The world is undergoing multiple environmental change phenomena but environmental change phenomena that will impact on economies, livelihoods and health issues to ones connected with agriculture, foreign policy and even security.

Under the climate convention we may be seeing this already. The Bali meeting will also include a gathering of finance ministers as well as the environment ministers who traditionally carry out the negotiations.

In respect to these two conventions, UNEP is keen to press forward with integrating all Regional Seas Programmes into national frameworks.

On a specific note, UNEP is also keen to encourage the use of Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) not least because of the need to balance the emerging opportunities off Africa's coast for oil and gas with the sustainability challenges.

The issue of financial sustainability is also a critical issue. It requires a decisive commitment by all the Contracting Parties to contribute to the Conventions' Trust Funds.

Your participation will provide both additional funding for catalytic activities and a practical demonstration of commitment to the work of the two Conventions. This will encourage our partners to increase their collaboration with the Contracting Parties.

There is also a need to further strengthen Regional Coordinating Units to ensure they are effective agents of change.

An important step forward will also be increasing cooperation between all multilateral environmental agreements and increasing cooperation between UN agencies but also other important players including local authorities; the financial markets, civil society and citizens.

The UN is engaged in a reform process under the banner ‘Delivering as One’—this concept has wider resonance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Africa’s abundant nature-based and natural resources are and will increasingly be the engine that will assist in meeting the Millennium Development Goals while lifting this Continent into a more equitable and prosperous future.

From agriculture to the world’s biggest industry—tourism—Africa’s land and coastal areas represent a blue-print for dynamic economic growth that is beginning to attract international and cross border investment and entrepreneurs on a scale perhaps never witnessed before.

It is in many ways a defining moment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

vibrant, cooperative and strengthened treaties like the Nairobi and Abidjan Conventions represent part of that insurance policy—part of that essential policy response—upon which this development can be managed in an intelligent and sustainable way—for current and future generations.

Let us together evolve the two agreements onto the next level so they can effectively and efficiently respond to the challenges but also the opportunities coming so fast, Africa’s way.

Thank you