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Fourteenth Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP14)
to the Convention on Cooperation for Protection,
Management and Development of the Marine Environment and
Coastal Areas of the Atlantic Coast of the
West, Central and Southern African Region
(Abidjan Convention)

Nouakchott, Mauritania, 21st to 23rd May 2025

CONVENTION FOR COOPERATION IN THE PROTECTION, MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARINE AND COASTAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE ATLANTIC COAST OF THE WEST, CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION

The Abidjan Convention

The West and Central African region is among the oldest Regional Seas programmes forged in the early 1980s through an Action Plan for the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region (otherwise known as the Abidjan Convention) and an associated Protocol concerning pollution.

The Action Plan was adopted by 11 countries at a Conference in Abidjan in March, 1981. The Convention and Protocol entered into force on 5th August, 1984 after the deposit of the sixth instrument of ratification.

The Abidjan Convention is now officially known as the Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern Africa Region.

Convention Area and Contracting parties

The Convention covers the marine environment, coastal zones and related inland waters falling within the jurisdiction of the States of the West and Central and Southern African Region, from Mauritania to the Western coast of South Africa inclusive – a distance of just over 14,000 kilometres along the coast.

Countries in the Convention area are: Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Congo (Dem Rep of), Congo (Rep of), Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Namibia, Nigeria, Sao Tome Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Togo.

The Contracting Parties that have ratified the Convention are: Benin, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Togo.

The Abidjan Convention is a comprehensive umbrella agreement for the protection and management of the marine and coastal areas. It lists the sources of pollution that require control: ships, dumping, land-based activities, exploration and exploitation of the seabed, and pollution from or through the atmosphere. It also identifies environmental management issues from which cooperative efforts are to be made: coastal erosion, specially protected areas, combating pollution in cases of emergency; and environmental impact assessment. There are also articles on scientific and technological cooperation and liability and compensation.

The adoption of the West and Central African regional legal agreements was facilitated by numerous technical surveys, studies and reviews prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) with cooperation of the United Nations Organization; the United Nations Industrial Development Organization; the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission; the World Health Organization; the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization; and other organizations.

Abidjan Convention Protocols

The Conference of Plenipotentiaries on Cooperation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region in Abidjan from 16th to 23rd March 1981.

Eleven countries at the conference adopted an Action Plan for the West and Central African Region and two legal agreements:

- The Convention for Cooperation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region;
- The Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Combating Pollution in Cases of Emergency

By 1 October 1981, the legal agreements had been signed by 12 coastal States of the Region. The Government of the Côte d'Ivoire was designated as the Depositary for the Convention and Protocol. UNEP was designated as the secretariat of the Convention and Protocol. The secretariat has now moved to Abidjan, the Ivorian commercial capital.

The Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Combating Pollution in Cases of Emergency in the Western and Central African Region was adopted in 1985 and entered into force on 30 May 1996.

On June 22, 2012, the Protocol concerning the Cooperation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment from Land-Based Sources and the Activities (LBSA) in the Western, Central and Southern Africa Region was signed and officially adopted by the Contracted Parties, in Grand-Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire.

Abidjan Convention Articles

Convention for Cooperation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal environment of the West and Central African Region and protocol

Entry into force: 5 August 1984

The Contracting Parties,

Conscious of the economic, social and health value of the marine environment and coastal areas of the West and Central African Region,

Fully aware of their responsibility to preserve their natural heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations,

Recognizing the threat to the marine and coastal environment, its ecological equilibrium, resources and legitimate uses posed by pollution and by the absence of an integration of an environmental dimension into the development process,

Realizing fully the need for co-operation among the Contracting Parties in order to ensure sustainable, environmentally-sound development through a coordinated and comprehensive approach,

Realizing also the need for a carefully planned research, monitoring and assessment programme in view of the scarcity of scientific information on marine pollution in the West and Central African Region,

Noting that existing conventions concerning marine pollution do not cover, in spite of the progress achieved, all aspects and sources of marine pollution and do not entirely meet the special requirements of the West and Central African Region,

Have agreed as follows:

Article 1: GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

This Convention shall cover the marine environment, coastal zones and related inland waters falling within the jurisdiction of the States of the West and Central African Region, from Mauritania to Namibia inclusive, which have become Contracting Parties to this Convention under conditions set forth in article 27 and paragraph 1 of article 28 (hereinafter referred to as the Convention area).

Article 2: DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this Convention:

"Pollution" means the introduction by man, directly or indirectly, of substances or energy into the marine environment, coastal zones, and related inland waters resulting in such deleterious effects as harm to living resources, hazards to human health, hindrance to

marine activities, including fishing, impairment of quality for use of sea-water and reduction of amenities.

"Organization" means the body designated as the secretariat of the Convention and its related protocols according to article 16 of the Convention.

Article 3: GENERAL PROVISIONS

The Contracting Parties may enter into bilateral or multilateral agreements, including regional or subregional agreements, for the protection of the marine and coastal environment of the West and Central African Region, provided that such agreements are consistent with this Convention and conform to international law. Copies of such agreements shall be deposited with the Organization and, through the Organization, communicated to all Contracting Parties.

Nothing in this Convention or related protocols shall be deemed to affect obligations assumed by a Contracting Party under agreements previously concluded.

Nothing in this Convention shall prejudice the codification and development of the law of the sea by the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea convened pursuant to resolution 2750 C (XXV) of the General Assembly of the United Nations, nor the present or future claims and legal views of any Contracting Party concerning the nature and extent of its maritime jurisdiction.

Article 4: GENERAL OBLIGATIONS

The Contracting Parties shall, individually or jointly as the case may be, take all appropriate measures in accordance with the provisions of this Convention and its protocols in force to which they are parties to prevent, reduce, combat and control pollution of the Convention area and to ensure sound environmental management of natural resources, using for this purpose the best practicable means at their disposal, and in accordance with their capabilities.

In addition to the Protocol concerning cooperation in combating pollution in cases of emergency opened for signature on the same date as this Convention, the Contracting Parties shall cooperate in the formulation and adoption of other protocols prescribing agreed measures, procedures, and standards to prevent, reduce, combat and control pollution from all sources or promoting environmental management in conformity with the objectives of this Convention.

The Contracting Parties shall establish national laws and regulations for the effective discharge of the obligations prescribed in this Convention, and shall endeavour to harmonize their national policies in this regard.

The Contracting Parties shall co-operate with the competent international, regional and subregional organizations to establish and adopt recommended practices, procedures and measures to prevent, reduce, combat and control pollution from all sources in conformity with the objectives of this Convention and its related protocols, and to assist each other in fulfilling their obligations under this Convention and its related protocols.

In taking measures to prevent, reduce, combat and control pollution of the Convention area or to promote environmental management, the Contracting Parties shall act so as not to transfer, directly or indirectly, damage or hazards from one area to another or transform one type of pollution into another.

Article 5: POLLUTION FROM SHIPS

The Contracting Parties shall take all appropriate measures in conformity with international law to prevent, reduce, combat and control pollution in the Convention area caused by normal or accidental discharges from ships, and shall ensure the effective application in the Convention area of the internationally recognized rules and standards relating to the control of this type of pollution.

Article 6: POLLUTION CAUSED BY DUMPING FROM SHIPS AND AIRCRAFT

The Contracting Parties shall take all appropriate measures to prevent, reduce, combat and control pollution in the Convention area caused by dumping from ships and aircraft, and shall ensure the effective application in the Convention area of the internationally recognized rules and standards relating to the control of this type of pollution.

Article 7: POLLUTION FROM LAND-BASED SOURCES

The Contracting Parties shall take all appropriate measures to prevent, reduce, combat and control pollution of the Convention area caused b discharges from rivers, estuaries, coastal establishments and outfalls, coastal dumping or emanating from any other sources on their territories.

Article 8: POLLUTION FROM ACTIVITIES RELATING TO EXPLORATION AND EXPLOITATION OF THE SEA-BED

The Contracting Parties shall take all appropriate measures to prevent, reduce, combat and control pollution resulting from or in connection with activities relating to the exploration and exploitation of the sea-bed and its subsoil subject to their jurisdiction and from artificial islands, installations and structures under their jurisdiction.

Article 9: POLLUTION FROM OR THROUGH THE ATMOSPHERE

The Contracting Parties shall take all appropriate measures to prevent, reduce, combat and control pollution in the Convention area resulting from or transported through the atmosphere.

Article 10: COASTAL EROSION

The Contracting Parties shall take all appropriate measures to prevent, reduce, combat and control coastal erosion in the Convention area resulting from man's activities, such as land reclamation and coastal engineering.

Article 11: SPECIALLY PROTECTED AREAS

The Contracting Parties shall, individually or jointly as the case may be, take all appropriate measures to protect and preserve rare or fragile ecosystems as well as the habitat of depleted, threatened or endangered species and other marine life. To this end, the Contracting Parties shall endeavour to establish protected areas, such as parks and reserves, and to prohibit or control any activity likely to have adverse effects on the species, ecosystems or biological processes in such areas.

Article 12: COOPERATION IN COMBATING POLLUTION IN CASES OF EMERGENCY

The Contracting Parties shall co-operate in taking all necessary measures to deal with pollution emergencies in the Convention area, whatever the cause of such emergencies, and to reduce or eliminate damage resulting therefrom.

Any Contracting Party which becomes aware of a pollution emergency in the Convention area should, without delay, notify the Organization and, either through this Organization or directly, any other Contracting Party likely to be affected by such emergency.

Article 13: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

As part of their environmental management policies, the Contracting Parties shall develop technical and other guidelines to assist the planning of their development projects in such a way as to minimize their harmful impact on the Convention area.

Each Contracting Party shall endeavour to include an assessment of the potential environmental effects in any planning activity entailing projects within its territory, particularly in the coastal areas that may cause substantial pollution of, or significant and harmful changes to, the Convention area.

The Contracting Parties shall, in consultation with the Organization, develop procedures for the dissemination of information concerning the assessment of the activities referred to in paragraph 2 of this article.

Article 14: SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL CO-OPERATION

The Contracting Parties shall co-operate, with the assistance of competent international and regional organizations, in the field of scientific research, monitoring and assessment of pollution in the Convention area, and shall exchange data and other scientific information for the purpose of this Convention and its related protocols.

In addition, the Contracting Parties shall develop and co-ordinate national research and monitoring programmes concerning all types of pollution in the Convention area and shall establish, in co-operation with competent international and regional organizations, a regional network of national research centres and institutions to ensure compatible results. The Contracting Parties shall endeavour to participate in international arrangements for pollution research and monitoring in areas beyond their national jurisdiction.

The Contracting Parties shall co-operate directly or through competent international or regional organizations, in the development of programmes for technical and other assistance in fields related to marine pollution and sound environmental management of the Convention area.

Article 15: LIABILITY AND COMPENSATION

The Contracting Parties shall co-operate in the formulation and adoption of appropriate rules and procedures for the determination of liability and the payment of adequate and prompt compensation for damage resulting from pollution of the Convention area.

Article 16: INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The Contracting Parties designate the United Nations Environment Programme as the secretariat of the Convention to carry out the following functions:

To prepare and convene the meetings of Contracting Parties and conferences provided for in articles 17 and 18;

To transmit to the Contracting Parties notifications, reports and other information received in accordance with articles 3, 12, and 22;

To perform the functions assigned to it by the protocols to this Convention;

To consider enquiries by, and information from, the Contracting Parties and to consult with them on questions relating to this Convention and its related protocols and annexes thereto;

To co-ordinate the implementation of cooperative activities agreed upon by the meetings of Contracting Parties and conferences provided for in article 17;

To enter into such administrative arrangements as may be required for the effective discharge of the secretariat functions.

Each Contracting Party shall designate an appropriate national authority as responsible for the co-ordination of national efforts for implementing this Convention and its related protocols. The appropriate national authority shall serve as the channel of communication between the Contracting Party and the Organization.

Article 17: MEETINGS OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

The Contracting Parties shall hold ordinary meetings once every two years and extraordinary meetings at any other time deemed necessary, upon the request of the Organization or at the request of any Contracting Party, supported by at least three other Contracting Parties.

It shall be the function of the meetings of the Contracting Parties to keep under review the implementation of this Convention and its related protocols and, in particular:

To consider reports submitted by the Contracting Parties under article 22;

To adopt, review and amend as required annexes to this Convention and to its related protocols, in accordance with the provisions of article 20;

To make recommendations regarding the adoption of any additional protocols or amendments to this Convention or its related protocols in accordance with the provisions of articles 18 and 19;

To establish working groups as required to consider any matters concerning this Convention and its related protocols and annexes;

To review the state of pollution in the Convention area;

To consider and to adopt decisions concerning co-operative activities to be undertaken within the framework of this Convention and its related protocols, including their financial and institutional implications;

To consider and undertake any additional action that may be required for the achievement of the purposes of this Convention and its related protocols.

Article 18: ADOPTION OF ADDITIONAL PROTOCOLS

The Contracting Parties, at a conference of plenipotentiaries, may adopt additional protocols to this Convention pursuant to paragraph 2 of article 4.

A conference of plenipotentiaries shall be convened for the purpose of adopting additional protocols by the Organization at the request of not less than two thirds of the Contracting Parties.

Pending the entry into force of this Convention, the Organization may, after consulting with the signatories to this Convention, convene a conference of plenipotentiaries for the purpose of adopting additional protocols.

Article 19: AMENDMENT OF THE CONVENTION OR PROTOCOLS

Any Contracting Party to this Convention may propose amendments to the Convention or to any of the protocols. The texts of any such draft amendments shall be communicated to the Contracting Parties by the Organization six months before their submission to an ordinary meeting of the Contracting Parties for examination.

Any amendment shall be adopted by a two-thirds majority of the Contracting Parties and shall enter into force twelve months after its approval.

Article 20: ANNEXES AND AMENDMENTS TO ANNEXES

Annexes to this Convention or to any of its protocols shall form an integral part of the Convention or such protocol.

Except as may be otherwise provided in any protocol, the procedure foreseen in article 19 shall apply to the adoption and entry into force of any amendments to annexes to this Convention or to any protocol.

The adoption and entry into force of a new annex to this Convention or to any protocol shall be subject to the same procedure as the adoption and entry into force of an amendment to an annex in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 2 of this article provided that, if any amendment to the Convention or the protocol concerned is involved, the new annex shall not enter into force until such time as the amendment to the Convention or the protocol concerned enters into force.

Article 21: RULES OF PROCEDURE AND FINANCIAL RULES

The Contracting Parties shall adopt rules of procedure for their meetings and conferences envisaged in articles 17 and 18 above.

The Contracting Parties shall adopt financial rules, prepared in consultation with the Organization, to determine, in particular, their financial participation.

Article 22: REPORTS

The Contracting Parties shall transmit to the Organization reports on the measures adopted in the implementation of this Convention and of protocols to which they are Parties, in such form and at such intervals as the meetings of Contracting Parties may determine.

Article 23: COMPLIANCE CONTROL

The Contracting Parties undertake to co-operate in the development of procedures enabling them to control the application of this Convention and its related protocols.

Article 24: SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES

In case of a dispute between Contracting Parties as to the interpretation or application of this Convention or its related protocols, they shall seek a settlement of the dispute through negotiation or any other peaceful means of their own choice.

If the Parties concerned cannot settle their dispute through the means mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the dispute shall be submitted to arbitration under conditions to be adopted by the Contracting Parties in an annex to this Convention.

Article 25: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CONVENTION AND ITS RELATED PROTOCOLS

No State may become a Contracting Party to this Convention unless it becomes at the same time a Contracting Party to at least one protocol. No State may become a Contracting Party to a protocol unless it is, or becomes at the same time, a Contracting Party to this Convention.

Any protocol to this Convention shall be binding only on the Contracting Parties to the protocol in question.

Decisions concerning any protocol pursuant to articles 17, 19 and 20 of this Convention shall be taken only by the Parties to the protocol concerned.

Article 26: SIGNATURE

This Convention and the Protocol on Cooperation in Combating Pollution in Cases of Emergency shall be in Abidjan from 23 March to 22 June 1981 for signature by any coastal or island State, from Mauritania to Namibia inclusive.

Article 27: RATIFICATION, ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

This Convention and any protocol thereto shall be subject to ratification, acceptance, or approval. Instruments of ratification, acceptance or approval shall be deposited with the Government of the Ivory Coast, which will assume the functions of Depositary.

Article 28: ACCESSION

As from 23 June 1981, the present Convention and the Protocol concerning Co-operation in Combating Pollution in Cases of Emergency shall be open for accession by the States referred to in article 26.

After the entry into force of this Convention and any protocol thereto, any African State not referred to in article 26 may accede to them.

This Convention and any protocol thereto shall also remain open after the entry into force for accession by any other State, subject to the prior approval of three quarters of the States referred to in article 26 which have become Contracting Parties.

Instruments of accession shall be deposited with the Depositary.

Article 29: ENTRY INTO FORCE

This Convention and the first of its protocols shall enter into force on the same date, in accordance with the following paragraph 2.

The Convention and any of its protocols shall enter into force on the sixtieth day following the date of deposit of at least six instruments of ratification acceptance or approval of, or accession to, such Convention and protocol by the Parties referred to in article 26.

Thereafter, this Convention and any protocol thereto shall enter into force with respect to any State referred to in article 26 on the sixtieth day following the date of deposit of the instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession.

Article 30: WITHDRAWAL

At any time after five years from the date of entry into force of this Convention, any Contracting Party may withdraw from this Convention by giving written notification of withdrawal.

Except as may be otherwise provided in any protocol to this Convention, any Contracting Party may, at any time after five years from the date of entry into force of such protocol, withdraw from such protocol by giving written notification of withdrawal

Withdrawal shall take effect ninety days after the date on which notification of withdrawal is received by the Depositary.

Any Contracting Party which withdraws from this Convention shall be considered as also having withdrawn from any protocol to which it was a Party.

Any Contracting Party which, upon its withdrawal from a protocol, is no longer a Party to any protocol to this Convention, shall be considered as also having withdrawn from this Convention.

Article 31: RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DEPOSITARY

The Depositary shall inform the Contracting Parties, any other Party referred to in article 26, and the Organization:

Of the signature of this Convention and any protocol thereto, and of the deposit of instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession in accordance with articles 26, 27 and 28;

Of the date on which the Convention and any protocol will come into force in accordance with the provisions of article 29;

Of notifications of withdrawal made in accordance with article 30;

Of the amendments adopted with respect to the Convention and to any protocol, their acceptance by the Contracting Parties and the date of entry into force of these amendments in accordance with the provisions of article 19;

Of the adoption of new annexes and of the amendment of any annex in accordance with article 20.

The original of this Convention and of any protocol thereto shall be deposited with the Depositary, the Government of the Ivory Coast which shall send certified copies thereof to the Contracting Parties, to the Organization of African Unity, to the Organization, and to the Secretary- General of the United Nations for registration and publication in accordance with Article 102 of the United Nations Charter.

In witness whereof the undersigned, being duly authorized by their respective Governments, have signed this Convention.

Done at Abidjan on this twenty-third day of March one thousand nine hundred and eighty-one in a single copy in the English, French and Spanish languages, the three texts being equally authentic.

The Abidjan Convention Secretariat

The convention provides an important framework through which national policymakers and resource managers implement national control measures in the protection and development of the marine and coastal environment of the WACAF Region (West and Central African Region)

The Abidjan Convention is expected to play a leading role in guiding and sustaining environmental action for the protection and development of the coastal and marine areas through concerted efforts and activities to which governments and the citizenry can positively respond to facilitate in the complex challenges of the management processes of coastal areas.

The active involvement of all stakeholders is crucial, but the multiplier effect of action by a critical mass of committed parties, guided by UNEP, can provide and sustain the momentum required for achieving the objectives of the Convention for the benefit of all. The opportunities

are tremendous, in view of the increasing numbers of environmental initiatives and ongoing programmes/projects in the region. The constraints are equally daunting but surmountable, with increasing environmental awareness and responsibilities to our global common, one planet and one ocean.

Background on the Secretariat

The coastal waters of the Convention area contain highly productive ecosystems that support rich fisheries. However, there have been serious conflicts resulting in immense human suffering and poverty. In the last three decades or so, the rapid development, improper use of resources and extensive pollution has harmed coastal ecosystems. Today, coastal erosion and floods are key problems and are likely to be exacerbated by climate change. Destruction of critical habitats is widespread in the Convention area, and coastal communities are both the perpetrators and victims of this destruction.

After the Abidjan Convention came into force in 1984, projects on contingency planning, pollution control, coastal erosion, environmental impact assessment and environmental legislation followed.

A number of difficulties, including competing priorities and lack of resources, resulted in slow progress in activities of the Abidjan Convention between 1990 and 2002. Today, the Abidjan Convention is back on track. Activities planned to re-energize the Convention, include establishing a network of focal points. The focal points will meet regularly in a Focal Points Forum each year and prepare the work programme.

The Seventh Conference of Parties (COP 7), that was held in 2005, provided a turning point by establishing a new ecosystem-based coordination structure. Countries within each of the Benguela, Guinea and Canary current ecosystems were coordinated as autonomous units/nodes of the Abidjan Convention.

The activities of the Abidjan Convention that are coordinated directly by the Nairobi-based Joint Implementation Unit of the Nairobi and Abidjan Conventions and the Abidjan-based Regional Coordination Unit will increasingly be coordinated at the regional level through collaborations and partnership between the Convention and the GEF-sponsored Large Marine Ecosystem projects under implementation in the Convention area. The Convention designated Cote d'Ivoire as the Depository, and UNEP as the Secretariat. The Regional Coordinating Unit is based in Abidjan. There have been 10 Conference of Parties meetings, the most recent in Pointe Noire, Republic of Congo, in November 2012.

Armed with renewed goodwill from the Contracting Parties, together with the opportunities presented through other initiatives such as the African Process for the Development and Management of the Coastal and Marine Resources and the New Partnership for Africa Development (or NEPAD), states can begin to fulfil the promise of their potentially rich and prosperous region and its natural splendours. The Abidjan Convention also hopes to learn and benefit from the family of Regional Seas programmes such as the North-East Atlantic region, known as OSPAR.