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Report of the 8th Global Meeting of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans

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The 8th Global Meeting of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, was held in Beijing, Peoples Republic of China, from 13th-14th October 2005, prior to the Second Intergovernmental Review Meeting (IGR-2) of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA). The meeting was attended by the coordinators or representatives of the Regional Seas Programmes, representatives from biodiversity related conventions (CBD[1] and CMS[2]) and programmes (GISP[3]), NOAA[4]'s Large Marine Ecosystem Program and GRID Arendal. The first day of the meeting addressed issues pertaining to the IGR-2. Presentations were also made on the progress in implementing the global RS strategic directions. The second day addressed global and regional cooperation with particular focus on global conventions and programmes. A presentation was also made on the delineation of the continental shelf.

Opening remarks: The Head of the Regional Seas Programme (RSP) welcomed participants, acknowledging the kind offer and support from the People's Republic of China to host the Regional Seas meeting as well as the GPA/IGR2. She gave a brief introduction of the agenda, particularly soliciting participants' input to the IGR-2 meeting. In her introduction, and following discussions at the previous global meeting on financing, she acknowledged with great appreciation the various donors supporting the Regional Seas including among others, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), USA, Norway, and the GEF. The Regional Seas Programmes provide operational frameworks to execute GEF projects in the region. It was noted that UNEP was preparing a strategy paper on its role in the GEF. In this context, it was proposed that the RS prepares a paper that can be submitted to the Executive Director on its future role in the GEF. Following the partnership with the Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) Programme, joint activities and collaboration was already progressing between the RS and the GEF/LME projects. The experience in the Mediterranean in establishing an investment fund was also shared. The opportunity was also taken to welcome the new coordinators and participants to the Global Regional Seas Meetings. The entry into force of the Tehran Convention (Caspian) in August 2006 was also noted and recognized as a reflection of the continued commitment and ownership of the countries in the region.

Session 1: Regional Seas Strategic Directions, 2004-2007 (*see INF.3.RS*)

Regional Seas Coordinating Office: A brief presentation was made by the Regional Seas Coordinating Office on their progress to-date, in implementing the six global Regional Seas Strategic Directions (INF.3.RS). Of particularly highlight was the launch of the Regional Seas Database Manager on the RS website, which consolidates all the information pertaining to major partners and actors in the regions, in the conservation and management of the marine and coastal environment. This follows the preference by most of the regions to harmonize information into a consolidated data management system. The database should continue to facilitate partnerships and consultations on cooperation and best practices as well as assist in monitoring projects, accessing information and referencing material.

The individual Regional Seas Programmes: Through a 'tour de table', each region presented its progress on how the strategic directions are being addressed and implemented within the context of their work programmes. Considerable progress was noted in each region (individual presentations are available on the RS website: http://www.unep.org/regionalseas/). It was noted that in the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR), in order increase

[1] CBD – Convention on Biological Diversity
[2] CMS – Convention on Migratory Species
[3] GISP – Global Invasive Species Programme
[4] NOAA – National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration

the impact of their actions, the six global Regional Seas Strategic Directions formed the framework for the five-year strategy of the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP), as approved by their 11th IGM in 2004 - The *Outline of the Strategy to Enhance the Caribbean Environment Programme for 2005-2009*. This strategy has been used to guide the further development and implementation of CEP Projects and Activities for the 2005/2006 biennium. CEP also presented its experiences and activities against each of the strategic directions, ranging from partnerships to cross-cutting projects and activities occurring at regional, sub-regional and national levels that were addressing issues of poverty alleviation, sustainable livelihoods and economic development through environmental interventions. The development of financing strategies was also underway in the region. Among others, highlights in Eastern Africa and West & Central Africa included the use of a network of research institutes to facilitate implementation at the national level (as well as the regions' actions) of poverty reduction strategies. The increase in contributions by North West Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP) member countries to their trust fund was noted as a gesture of the commitment by the countries. It was also noted that NOWPAP comprises the youngest Regional Coordinating Units. In the Black Sea, a number of partnerships were noted including collaboration with the EC in various activities, among others, the analysis of the regional convention, contribution to the EU Marine Strategy and the EU TACIS project. Other highlights in the Black Sea included the use of the ecosystem approach as a core principle in the development of the new strategies and protocols for example the regional integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) strategy to be finalized in 2007. An overview of the Caspian Environment Programme (CEP) was presented. Though only in operation since 1998, CEP has established cooperation with major international partners including the GEF, EC, World Bank, UNDP and UNEP. In addition to the entry into force of the Tehran Convention last August, four protocols were already under development. In South Asia, priority areas included among others, ICZM, pollution from oil spills and land-based activities. Various projects had been initiated including an EU funded project on marine and coastal protected areas encompassing coral reefs, launched in January 2006. In reference to the Baltic, the meeting was informed that the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan was underway and would hopefully be adopted at the Ministerial meeting scheduled for November 2007. The action plan aims at providing an environmental strategy for the Baltic Sea region. HELCOM also informed the meeting about their strategic goals (i.e., eutrophication, biodiversity and nature conservation, and oil) and the work being undertaken for the definition of targets and scientifically sound indicators for each of the strategic goals. East Asia Seas informed the meeting of its proposed new strategic direction intended to focus on information management in enhancing knowledge-based policy making and capacity building among others. The proposed strategy would also aim at enhancing collaboration among the various partners in the management of the marine and coastal environment in the region. In the Mediterranean, major highlights included the adoption and implementation of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (*presented later in this report)*; the GEF Partnership for Mediterranean Sustainability, where countries were being assisted in the preparation of National Action Plans as well as pre-investment studies for selected pollution hot spots; and the new GEF Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Sea Large Marine Ecosystem. The South East Pacific presented its major activities within the context of the LBS protocol as well as marine mammals. One of the main highlights in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA) included the inauguration of the Marine Emergency Mutual Aid Centre (MEMAC) in May 2006 in Egypt. MEMAC would be responsible for the Regional Action Plan for Contingency Planning, in the region, in cooperation with IMO. The first training workshop was also held then, on oil spill and contingency planning. In the Northeast Pacific (NEP), collaboration was highlighted with regional and global partners in undertaking various activities, including among others on invasive species, wastewater management, networks on marine protected areas (MPAs) and knowledge-based management through the development of a database to support regional policy makers. NEP also indicated the strengthened relations with environment ministries in the region.

In conclusion, the RS Coordinating Office appreciated the efforts and commitment by the Regional Seas towards the integration and implementation of the strategic directions within their existing work programmes. The need to raise the visibility of the Regional Seas at the upcoming IGR-2 and the UNEP Governing Council was stressed.

Session 2: IGR-2, 16-20 October, 2006, Beijing (*see http://www.gpa.unep.org/content.html?id=344&ln=6*)

The discussions began with an appreciation to the Coordinators for their efforts in facilitating representation from their regions at the highest level. A brief overview of the IGR-2 was presented, including an explanation on expected outcomes i.e.: the Beijing Declaration, the GPA Programme of Work 2007-2011, the Guidance document and the Chairman's Summary on the Ministerial Roundtables. The secretariat explained that some of the outcomes of the IGR-2 would go, as appropriate, to the next session of the UNEP Governing Council in February 2007 for approval and adoption, since it is the decision making body of UNEP. Partnerships were also noted as one of the major highlights of the IGR-2. The full list of the partnerships, their description and outcome is on: http://www.gpa.unep.org/content.html?id=343&ln=6. A number of these partnerships among which the Regional Seas Programmes were also participating were initiated at the IGR-2.

The meeting was informed of potential nominees for the IGR-2 bureau members and the coordinators called upon to assist with nominees from their respective regions in order to identify the most appropriate and well-distributed representation. In running through the agenda of Day 1 on National Programmes of Action and the three breakout sessions (Mainstreaming the GPA into national developing planning, Financing the Implementation of GPA, & Strengthening Legislative and Institutional Frameworks to further the Implementation of the GPA), the coordinators were requested to confirm to which session they would participate as well as encourage their regions to participate in order to mobilize high participation in all three sessions. In reference to Day 2 on Partnerships, the coordinators who were responsible for various partnerships gave an overview of the partnerships and called upon the others to ensure active participation in these. Among those discussed included: National Implementation of Land-based Activities (LBA) protocols in partnership with the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans; Global Partnership for Marine Litter; and Establishing a London Convention – GPA – Regional Seas Partnership.

Most of the rest of the discussions dwelt on the last two days of the IGR-2, as these constituted the ministerial segment. The idea of having round table discussions with specific issues and questions to address, was very much welcomed and preferred to the traditional practice where ministers would give speeches and presentations in plenary. As there was not going to be translation during the round table discussions, it was suggested that the tables be distributed according to the language and also depending on the regional representation.

Session 3: Delineation of the Continental Shelf

The representative from the Global Resource Information Database (GRID Arendal) began by presenting the continental shelf boundaries and their limits as derived from the 1985 Geneva Convention and the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). He highlighted the Coastal States' responsibilities in defining their continental shelf boundaries, among others that States should make their submission as soon as possible, and within 10 years of the entry into force of the Convention on the Law of the Sea within that State. However, States having ratified the Convention before 13th May 1999, when the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) adopted the scientific and technical guidelines, must make their submission within 10 years of that date, i.e. 13 May 2009, when the programme to delineate the continental shelf would begin. The representative further presented the UNEP Shelf Programme, that aims among others, to facilitate as many developing countries and small island states as possible in the identification and access of the data they require to comply with Article 76 of UNCLOS (on the continental shelf); and to provide training and support to local staff in relevant aspects of long term capacity building and compliance with the convention. The Regional Seas Programmes were called upon to assist their member states in making their submissions in time.

Session 4: Global and Regional Cooperation

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): The representative from CBD began by presenting the Jakarta mandate and the programme of work on marine and coastal biodiversity within the context of CBD. He also presented other relevant decisions of the Contracting Parties and targets for marine and coastal biodiversity. He cited a number of partnerships and collaboration with various Regional Seas Programmes including the Wider Caribbean, Southeast Pacific, and the Mediterranean among others. He also noted the collaboration with other global conventions including CMS and the Ramsar[5] Convention. He further presented the framework for assessing implementation of the CBD, and progress towards achieving the 2010 targets which aim at a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national levels, as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth. He presented the 21 targets for marine and coastal biodiversity. He also informed of forthcoming events that were relevant to the Regional Seas Programmes, and stressed the important role the Regional Seas were playing in providing a platform for the implementation of the CBD among other MEAs.

Convention on Migratory Species (CMS): The Executive Secretary of CMS began by giving background of the CMS Convention signed in Bonn in 1979. CMS is an 'umbrella' Convention with a series of species-specific regional agreements, some self-standing treaties (e.g. AEWA[6], ACAP[7], ASCOBANS[8] and ACCOBAMS[9]) and others non-binding MOUs (e.g. IOSEA[10]). Of likely interest to the current meeting as cited by the Executive Secretary were the marine species covered by CMS including: seals, cetaceans (whales and dolphins), turtles, birds (albatrosses and petrels), sirenians (dugongs and manatees) and sharks. He highlighted that CMS activities related in a number of ways to other MEAs and included collaboration with CBD, CITES[11], IWC[12], Ramsar as well as the Regional Seas Conventions. He also informed that the CMS COP 8 (Nairobi, November 2005) had passed a resolution calling for a programme of work to be elaborated in cooperation with a number of relevant organizations including the global Regional Seas Programme, which would be submitted to CMS COP 9. He took the opportunity to formally announce a major initiative launched by CMS in conjunction with other partners, declaring 2007 as the 'Year of the Dolphin', in efforts to protect dolphins, and inviting the RSPs to participate. He indicated that this would be part of the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development, and a tangible contribution towards meeting targets to reduce the loss of wildlife by 2010. He summarized by presenting a table that reflected the 18 RSPs and CMS related activities in each of the regions, noting that only two regions had little CMS involvement and calling upon all the regions to follow the example set by the Caribbean and SPREP (Pacific) in entering partnership agreement with CMS. He further identified a list of possible areas where the Regional Seas could add value to the implementation of the CMS, including through regional buy-in, presence and expertise as well as calling on RS support in increasing Parties to the CMS and implementation by existing Parties. He informed that Yemen was about to become the 100th Party and thanked PERSGA in helping through the process.

Global Invasive Species Programme (GISP): The GISP Director began by giving a brief background of the Programme, which is hosted in South Africa, and further presented the sector on marine and coastal invasive alien species (MIAS). She noted that invasive alien species constituted one of the greatest threats to biodiversity across all ecosystems and also one of the four major threats to the world's oceans. She provided an overview indicating constraints imposed by invasive species to the Millennium Development Goals, ranging from that on eradicating poverty, impacted by the reduced yields of fisheries, natural resources for subsistence (food security), and reduced

[5] Ramsar – Convention on Wetlands (signed in Ramsar)
[6] AEWA – African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement
[7] ACAP – Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels
[8] ASCOBANS – Agreement on Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas
[9] ACCOBAMS – Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black and Mediterranean Seas and contiguous Atlantic Area.
[10] IOSEA – Indian Ocean and South East Asian Turtles.
[11] CITES – Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
[12] IWC – International Whaling Commission (International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling)

tourism potential among many others, to other goals related to health and environmental sustainability. International initiatives addressing invasive species such as IMO (ballast water), FAO and ICES (guidelines for 'fisheries' introductions), CBD were also cited. It was noted that a number of activities had been or were being undertaken in collaboration with UNEP including: the development of an awareness-raising brochure, training course on marine invasive alien species, joint global work programme and a needs assessment that was still underway, and countries urged to respond to the questionnaires distributed in June 2006. The joint global work programme on IAS sought to bring together all relevant international and regional regulatory bodies and other partners to ensure gaps were identified and addressed. Several regions were noted as already having regional activities on MIAS. Potential opportunities for collaboration included the GEF Medium-Sized project on Globallast in conjunction with IMO. GISP called upon the urgent need for a concerted coordinated programme on MIAS and encouraged the inclusion of related activities into the work programmes of the RSCAPs, citing a couple of examples such as baseline assessments as part of biodiversity surveys, awareness raising and training among others.

Marine Litter: The Regional Seas Coordinating Office presented the global initiative on Marine Litter highlighting that 11 Regional Seas Programmes were already participating through various regional activities in addressing this issue. Among others, a flexible and regional-adaptable template had been developed that was being used by the regions through engaging national and regional consultants to undertake a regional assessment on existing legal, institutional and administrative arrangements, capacities and funding resources as well as data and information on marine litter in the region. Through this review the regions were expected to identify gaps and needs of coverage of marine litter management in order to consequently develop strategies and propose recommendations towards the management of marine litter in the region. It was noted that the UN General Assembly had highlighted the issue of marine litter/debris in its Resolution A/60/L.22- Oceans and Law of the Sea – of 29 November 2005. Some of the challenges highlighted by the RS Coordinating Office included: the sustainability of this global initiative; the sustainability of the regional plans and their integration into the work programmes of the individual RSPs; cooperation with global partners; finding donor agencies to support sub-projects such as the development of harmonized marine litter monitoring guidelines; accessing GEF support and changes in GEF strategies and priorities; addressing the issue of abandoned and lost fishing gear as well as the use of economic instruments in managing marine litter. The regions were called upon to continue to actively participate in addressing marine litter, an issue of global concern.

Financial Instruments and Sustainability: The Regional Seas Coordinating Office presented ongoing activities related to enhancing long-term sustainable financing mechanisms in the RSPs. Particular mention was made to the new publication "Financing the implementation of the regional seas conventions and action plans – A guide for national action" which provided a basis for national identification of potential sources of funding ranging from grants, loans, polluter pays principle, economic instruments, subsidies, amongst others. A pivotal argument presented was that in order to achieve sustainable financing at the RSPs it was necessary to actively engage member countries into integrating environmental commitments in national economic and development plans, thus opening new resources for environmental activities within national budgets.

Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs): The opportunity was taken to present the LME approach to marine resources assessment and management. The increased partnership between the Regional Seas Programmes and the GEF/LME projects was noted. The need for a consistent set of indicators to measure progress, for example via the current reports on the State of the Environment was also noted. Within the context of the LMEs, the five modular assessments for sustainable development, defining the changing ecosystem states were presented as: productivity; fish and fisheries; pollution; socioeconomic; and governance. The meeting was informed that a set of indicators for each of these modules were currently being defined, some of which were also presented. Of particular interest was the presentation on ecosystem management as a paradigm shift from: individual species to ecosystems; small spatial scale to multiple scale; short-term perspective to long-term perspective; humans independent of ecosystems to

humans as an integral part of ecosystems; management divorced from research to adaptive management; and from managing commodities to sustaining production potential for goods and services.

The Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD): The Coordinator of the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) presented the MSSD, beginning with an overview on the structure of the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development that constitutes the 22 Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and 15 representatives from Civil Society. The MSSD was set up in order to address the regional response to global commitments such as the Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI). It was formally endorsed at the Meeting of the Contracting Parties in November 2005 in Slovenia. In order to achieve its long-term goals, the MSSD concentrates on seven essential fields of action with targets set to achieve these. These fields include: protecting the sea, urgently putting an end to the degradation of coastal areas and promoting sustainable coastal management; promoting sustainable cities, controlling urban sprawl and preventing the degradation of air quality; promoting quality agriculture and sustainable rural development; promoting better management of water resources and of their demand in response to future needs; managing energy demand and reducing the long-term effects of climate change; ensuring sustainable mobility through suitable transport management; making tourism a leading vector for sustainable Mediterranean development. Various countries were already developing National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSSDs). In applying the strategy and monitoring progress, regional assessments would be carried out every five years.

Legal Support: The regions were requested to indicate to the RS Coordinating Office on the legal support needed in the regions. Some regions immediately responded to this including: East Africa and West and Central Africa in the drafting of their land-based sources and activities protocol and the Wider Caribbean in the drafting of national legislation and the drafting of the Rules of Procedure and Financial Rules for the Caribbean Environment Programme, and Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Regional Activity Centres and Regional Activity Networks. A presentation was further made on the publication "Implementation of the GPA at the Regional Level: *The Role of the Regional Seas Conventions and their Protocols"*, prepared on the occasion of the IGR-2. The UNEP/GPA Coordination Office had commissioned this review of existing binding and non-binding instruments that address the protection of the marine environment from LBSA to show the opportunities and challenges of both mechanisms. The objective of the review was to provide a guide to more effective implementation of the GPA, primarily at regional level. The review highlights the role of International Law in supporting sustainable ocean development and the prevention of marine pollution from LBSA; and shows interaction between legally-binding and non-binding instruments as well as the differences in their implementation in the various regions. The review also compares the GPA with key features of LBSA Protocols; describes how the GPA source categories are addressed in the different regions; analyses how capacity building, funding mechanisms, monitoring and assessment, and regional cooperation are considered in LBSA Protocols.

Next Meeting: As informed in the previous global meeting, it was noted that 9th Meeting of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans would be held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in October 2007, at the generous invitation of the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA). It was proposed that the next meeting would address the next steps following the global strategic directions, 2004-2007, with major focus on ecosystem approaches.

Closing: The Regional Seas Coordinating Office thanked the participants for their active participation and contributions to the discussions during the meeting and looked forward to their continued involvement during the IGR-2. The Wider Caribbean on behalf of the other coordinators thanked the Coordinating Office as well the government of the Republic of China for hosting this meeting and welcomed the kind invitation of PERSGA to host the next meeting in Jeddah.