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Geneva, 5 - 10 February 1979

THE ROLE OF THE REGIONAL OIL COMBATING CENTRE
FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Note: The attached memorandum is submitted by the delegation of Malta
for distribution to the participants of the Meeting for their
information

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THE ROLE OF THE REGIONAL OIL COMBATING CENTRE FOR THE
MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Memorandum Submitted by the Delegation of Malta

1. The Government of The Republic of Malta has noted the report on the activities of the Regional Oil Combating Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (UNEP/IG.14/INF.12) and the relevant paragraphs in The Executive Director of UNEP's report (UNEP/IG.14/4, Annex III, Section IV), and agrees fully with the recommendations contained therein, and with the specific recommendation in para 69 of the latter document (Annex III, Section VI) that the functions of the Centre as set out in Resolution 7 of the 1976 Barcelona Plenipotentiary Conference should be expanded to enable it to perform the duties assigned to the Regional Centre in accordance with the provisions of the 1976 Cooperation Protocol.
2. Both as the host country, with the resultant intimacy of contact with the Regional Centre, and as a Mediterranean Coastal State concerned about the need for protecting the regional environment as a whole, the Government of Malta appreciates the work performed so far by the Centre since its inauguration in December 1976, as well as the difficulties encountered during this initial phase of its activities. It is felt, however, that the workplan of the Centre during the next few years should be reflected in a dynamic programme of activities to ensure the state of preparedness of all Mediterranean States to combat any oil pollution emergency within the region with optimum efficiency. Such a programme can be pursued by the Centre, given optimal internal organization and the full cooperation of all Mediterranean Coastal States.
3. One of the main objectives common to all coastal States is that in the shortest possible time, the region as a whole should attain self-sufficiency in the availability of oil pollution control expertise, especially where the combating of gross incidents is concerned. The present situation indicates that for some time at least, expert assistance from outside the region may be necessary

in some emergencies. It is proposed that this situation be remedied by an accelerated training programme, utilising opportunities at global level, in which the Regional Centre should play an increasing catalytic and coordinative role. This programme should be organized on a regional scale, and should include not only workshops and seminars, but demonstrations and exercises, and wherever possible, full-scale rehearsals. It is important that such a training programme includes the practical aspect as its major component. During such a programme the Centre should not hesitate to make the fullest possible use of competent extra-regional assistance as a short-term measure wherever this would accelerate the development of intra-regional expertise.

4. The Government of Malta, in common with other Governments, also feels that the main role of the Regional Centre during the coming years should be geared to the formulation and development of contingency plans to meet overall regional requirements for the effective combating of gross oil pollution incidents. The Centre is already performing a useful role in assisting those coastal States so requesting to develop and implement their national contingency at an increasing pace until every country within the region has its own national contingency plan on an operational footing.
5. Concurrently with such an activity, and in full realization of the facts that (a) very few countries within the region will be able to cope with a gross emergency out of national resources, and (b) any such gross emergency is bound to affect more than one particular country. It is proposed that the Centre should immediately commence the promotion of a phased programme, keeping in view the already existing and planned activities of the various countries involved, aimed at the eventual development of joint contingency plans to cover the whole region. This will ensure that should a gross pollution emergency occur anywhere within the Mediterranean, the necessary resources would be immediately available to control it.
6. The first phase of such a programme could be a two-pronged effort. The Centre should, to the fullest extent possible, assist in the development of contingency plans at bilateral and multilateral levels as the various national plans assume an operational basis. At the same time, serious consideration should be given to the development of contingency plans at sub-regional level. One area which would be eminently suitable in this regard is the Central Mediterranean area,

which is particularly sensitive because of the comparative narrowness of its waters, with the resultant increased risk of maritime accidents. It is proposed that the appropriate Governments of this sub-region consider the development of an appropriate joint contingency plan, which would not only cater for their own common requirements, but which would also serve as a basis for complementary plans within other parts of the Mediterranean.

7. The Government of Malta, whose national contingency plan has already been formulated and will be operational within the next few months, is willing to participate in such a joint sub-regional activity, and recognizes the valuable role the Centre can play in assisting such a venture, which together with the other activities proposed should go a long way towards establishing overall regional preparedness on a permanent and concrete footing.

