

16th Global Meeting of the Regional Seas Conventions
and Action Plans
(29.09.2014 – 01.10.2014, ATHENS)

Distinguished Chair,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank to UNEP for hosting us here in Athens and organizing this meeting.

As we all know, we are commonly using our seas for many purposes. In this respect, seas have a crucial socio-economic and cultural importance.

However, as a result of growing human population, industrialization and urbanization, the degradation of our oceans and seas is increasing day by day. And the only way to prevent their degradation is to develop common mechanisms that are producing common environmental policies and measures.

In this respect, Regional Seas Conventions have significant role in harmonizing and coordinating national efforts with regional and global ones.

Distinguished Participants,

The Barcelona Convention, since 1975, is one of the most important regional seas conventions. Although the initial focus of Barcelona Convention was on marine pollution control, over the years its mandate has gradually widened to include;

- Biodiversity
- Integrated coastal zone planning,
- Sustainable consumption and production
- Climate change

During these years, the Contracting Parties have made great efforts to protect the marine environment. Beyond controlling pollution and addressing the challenges of environmental degradation, the Barcelona Convention has made substantive achievements in the region;

- Providing an important forum for the equitable participation by the Mediterranean countries,
- Putting environmental issues on the political agenda,
- Encouraging the adoption of environmental legislation and regulations, and
- Fostering and providing assistance for capacity-building in dealing with environmental protection in the region.

Despite the ongoing efforts of the Parties under the Barcelona Convention, the Mediterranean environment has continued to deteriorate mostly as a result of;

- Coastal urban sprawl
- Overfishing,
- Problems linked with large vessels,
- Deep-water oil drilling and
- Climate change

The global and regional political, social and economic developments have also been adversely affecting the Mediterranean.

In parallel to these external circumstances, the Convention has also been confronted with some internal problems of financial and administrative issues. These challenges reminded us that effective governance and sustainability are the key elements for success.

To that end, we are trying to implement measures to strengthen resource management and to ensure the efficient delivery of the Programme of Work.

To strengthen the overall management, we adopted essential decisions during COP 18 in Istanbul such as;

- Development of the Mid-term Strategy
- Underlining the importance of alignment with new Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development which currently is under revision
- Development of the Sustainable Consumption and Production
- Regional Action Plan and
- Ecosystem based approach process

We are focusing on longer and more flexible planning process to address the impending issues. Since we think this would be very constructive in rebuilding the future of the Barcelona Convention and MAP to continue to be a leading entity in the region; we try to frame our Mid-Term Strategy employing principles of;

- Long-term and flexible planning,
- Target-oriented and measureable progress by some pre-defined success indicators.

But certainly, the common objectives to improve the overall management of the Mediterranean can only be achieved by strengthening the linkages and synergies among the various Mediterranean initiatives and actors.

Ladies and Gentleman,

As you know, the last Meeting of the Contracting Parties was held in İstanbul in December and Turkey took over the two years presidency of the Convention. It is a big honor but at the same time very heavy responsibility, since we have important issues to be handled immediately in the Mediterranean.

Firstly, as you know, coastal urbanization has increased in the last four decades in our region. During this period, the population of the Mediterranean countries

concentrated in the shorelines grew;

- From *ninety five million* in 1979
- To *a hundred fifty five million* in 2010.

That situation *not only* aggravates the marine litter problem *but also* puts great pressure on the marine environment of the region especially on the coastline.

In this respect, we believe that we have to enhance cooperation with and support to local governments of coastal cities. With this concern during COP 18, Ministers launched the idea of an Environment-Friendly City Award for which we are now elaborating the criteria.

In Istanbul, Contracting Parties also adopted Marine Litter Regional Plan to prevent, reduce and remove litter in the Mediterranean. I can proudly say that it is *the first regional plan* adopted to follow up on the global commitment to reduce marine debris adopted at Rio+20 Conference. We believe that the implementation of this plan is very important to recover the Mediterranean ecosystem.

Also it is obvious that ecosystem based approach is one of the main pillars of the MAP. It was endorsed in the COP 18 decisions by the member states with the approval of a timetable for 2014-2017 to implement the next steps of the Ecosystem Approach Roadmap.

Lastly, we also believe that tighter cooperation between Regional Sea Conventions which have common borders should be further forged ahead. For this reason, we are working on Memorandum of Understanding between the Barcelona and Bucharest Conventions. This will also increase efficiency of sharing information and experience among the regions.

All these COP 18 decisions well suit to the Regional Seas Strategic Directions. Thus underpinning the course of action of the Regional Seas Conventions and the Action Plans, we believe as UNEP/MAP, these COP 18 decisions could be referred as the good examples at the international level.

Distinguished Participants,

Let me conclude with a Turkish saying;

“İğneyi kendine, çuvaldızı başkasına batır.”

It means;

“Prick yourself with a needle before you stick an awl into others.”

That is to say before we look at the others, we need to look at ourselves first to criticize ourselves where needed, to learn from the past and to use our experiences to build up a new future.

I strongly believe that the Regional Seas Conventions are the key tools for governing our seas and oceans in sustainable and ecosystem based management. Regional Seas Conventions have the legacy, mandate and competency to do this.

We need to take bold steps forward to face the impending problems of a quickly changing world by;

- Embodying *more effective governance* including collaboration, participatory action with and transparency to the public.
- *Long and flexible planning* including easy mobilization of resources, measurable progress by indicators and flexibility to adopt to a quickly rising environmental challenges
- And employing *cultural dimension of the seas in our policies, the Mediterranean, has been and still is a hub for cultivating our common future.*

This will be our legacy.

Thank you very much.