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AMCEN Bulletin

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MINISTERIAL SEGMENT OF THE TWELFTH SESSION OF THE AFRICAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE ENVIRONMENT HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 10 JUNE 2008

The ministerial segment of the twelfth session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN-12) opened on Tuesday, 10 June 2008, at the Sandton International Convention Centre in Johannesburg, South Africa. Ministers and their advisors met in the afternoon to: hear opening statements and presentations on subregional environmental plans for the implementation of the Action Plan for the Environment Initiative of NEPAD; welcome the launch of the publication of *Africa: Atlas of Our Changing Environment*; elect the Bureau and new President; and consider the report of the Expert Group segment.

OPENING OF THE MINISTERIAL SESSION

Marthinus van Schalkwyk, Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, South Africa, welcomed delegates to



Marthinus van Schalkwyk,
Minister of Environmental
Affairs and Tourism, South
Africa

Johannesburg, observing that demands for water and energy combined with escalating food and oil prices are creating new environmental challenges. He acknowledged efforts during the past ten years towards mainstreaming environment concerns, but drew attention to the stagnation of new science and policy capacity as well as the proliferation of environmental agreements, funds and entities. He emphasized the need for greater coordination and further strengthening of AMCEN's voice and leadership in the context of

international environmental governance. Turning to immediate challenges, van Schalkwyk highlighted the need for: strong political debate and coordinated negotiating positions; inter-agency coherence; and for the gap between commitments and action to be addressed. Highlighting UNEP as the authoritative voice for the environment, he called for the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building. He emphasized that climate change was the appropriate focus for AMCEN-12, and called for the

adoption of an "African road map" from Johannesburg to the UN Framework on Convention on Climate Change meeting in Copenhagen (UNFCCC COP-15).

Babagana Ahmadu, Director of Rural Economy and Agriculture, Commission of the African Union (AUC), highlighted several regional initiatives launched since the last AMCEN session, including: Climate for Development in Africa (ClimDevAfrica); Africa Monitoring of the Environment for Sustainable Development (AMESD); the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel (GGWSS); and the integration of disaster risk reduction into development policy and programmes. He urged AMCEN-12 to



Babagana Ahmadu, Director of
Rural Economy and Agriculture,
AUC

endorse the 2002 AU Summit decision on commemorating Africa Environment Day on 3 March, and to support its implementation on a regional rotational basis. Ahmadu concluded by reiterating the AU's commitment to finalize the integration of AMCEN and the African Minister's Conference on Water (AMCOW) as independent Specialized Technical Committees (STCs) of the AU.

Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director, urged assembled environment ministers to work towards overcoming marginalization of environment concerns in national portfolios by actively linking them to the development agenda. He drew



Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive
Director

attention to the *Africa Atlas* which he said highlights the finite nature of Africa's natural resources. In this context, he noted that: 60% of the continent's arable land is eroded and damaged by chemicals, a third of its pastures are classified as degraded; forests and woodlands are in decline; and many communities face water shortages on a seasonal or permanent basis. Reaffirming UNEP's commitment to the continent, Steiner reiterated the importance of Africa speaking

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with one voice on priority areas such as climate change, and expressed hope that AMCEN will emerge as the platform for regional dialogue on the environment.

André Okombi Salissa, AMCEN-11 President, gave an overview of activities undertaken by AMCEN during the Republic of Congo's presidency. He detailed efforts to address land degradation and acknowledged support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through TerrAfrica. He listed activities carried out relating to addressing invasive alien species, marine and coastal water resources and the implementation of the Abidjan and Nairobi Conventions. Regarding climate change, Salissa said AMCEN had organized preparatory meetings for African negotiators before UNFCCC COP-12 and 13, which had resulted in common negotiating positions. He concluded by discussing the future of AMCEN as an STC of the AU and declared the meeting open.



André Okombi Salissa, AMCEN-11 President

LAUNCH OF AFRICA: ATLAS OF OUR CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Following opening statements, a short film was shown to mark the launch of *Africa: Atlas of Our Changing Environment* (<http://www.na.unep.net/AfricaAtlas/>), an interactive resource on environmental degradation in Africa. The film informed that the *Africa Atlas*, compiled by UNEP and its partners, is the first to use high quality satellite images for all 53 African countries, providing an important tool for raising public awareness and supporting policy making and action.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

ELECTION OF THE OFFICERS: Following the announcement of regional candidates to the Bureau, AMCEN-12 elected the following by acclamation: Libya for North Africa; Burkina Faso for West Africa; Eritrea for East Africa; while Central Africa requested time for further consultation. South Africa, as AMCEN-12 President, serves automatically. The incoming AMCEN President, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, paid tribute to outgoing AMCEN-11 President, André Okombi Salissa, for his leadership. He described AMCEN as an instrument for harmonizing policies across Africa, specifically regarding climate change. Emphasizing the urgency of developing a unified African position at climate change negotiations, he noted the need for a special meeting of AMCEN to be held six months prior to UNFCCC COP-15.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA: The agenda for the meeting (UNEP/AMCEN/12/1 and 1/Add.1) was agreed without amendment.

PRESENTATIONS OF SUBREGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVE OF NEPAD

Mahmoud El Fallah, Libya, briefed delegates on AMCEN's capacity building initiative for the implementation of the Action Plan for the Environment Initiative of NEPAD. Noting that the preparation of subregional environment action plans (SREAPs) is central to the approach, he reported that SREAPs for North,

East, West, Central and Southern Africa had been completed and endorsed during ministerial consultations in 2007. He informed delegates that, following additional support from Norway, the project had moved into its second phase with the launch of pilot projects to develop national action plans for Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Libya and Mozambique.

CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT OF THE EXPERTS SEGMENT

Alexis Minga, Director General of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Republic of Congo, and Chair of the expert segment of AMCEN-12, presented a brief report on the meeting (UNEP/AMCEN/12/L.1). The meeting was attended by almost 40 country delegations, and representatives of specialized UN agencies, secretariats of relevant multilateral environmental agreements, regional and subregional organizations and civil society. He reported that during their deliberations the experts had reviewed 11 documents and finalized eight decisions for consideration and adoption by ministers. He further noted that following subregional consultations during the meeting, Mali had offered to host the thirteenth meeting of AMCEN in 2010.

FIRST EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION FOR COOPERATION IN THE PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARINE AND COASTAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICAN REGION

HIGHLIGHTS:

TUESDAY, 10 JUNE 2008

The first extraordinary meeting of the contracting parties to the Convention for Cooperation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region (Abidjan Convention) convened on Tuesday, 10 June 2008, in the Sandton International Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa. Delegates heard opening statements from the UNEP Executive Director and South Africa's Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, and received a report on the revitalization process of the Abidjan Convention. The meeting adopted seven decisions on the revitalization of the Abidjan Convention.

OPENING CEREMONY

The meeting was opened by Ibrahim Thiaw, UNEP, who welcomed delegates and praised the outcomes of the experts meeting, which immediately preceded this meeting.



Ibrahim Thiaw, UNEP

Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director, described the first extraordinary meeting as "a milestone" for the Abidjan Convention, and said it presented an opportunity to meet member states' expectations. He called for international and regional cooperation to combat the multiple challenges facing Africa's coastal and marine ecosystems. He added that the interlinkages between coastal,

marine and climate change challenges require a coordinated response, including from the GEF, IUCN and the World Wildlife Fund. He noted that US\$80m is available in the region through GEF and country co-financing for three large marine ecosystems programmes. Steiner also called on contracting parties to reflect on the experience of the Abidjan Convention as a basis on which to contribute to the debate on international environmental governance. He concluded by highlighting the need for international instruments to be effective and tailored to the African context.

In her opening statement, Rejoice Mabudafhasi, Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, South Africa, and Chair of the Abidjan Convention Bureau, reflected on the institutional history since the Convention's entry into force. Recalling that contracting parties at COP-8 in 2007, had recommitted to revitalizing the Convention, she observed that linking this extraordinary meeting to AMCEN-12 would generate momentum for addressing the recurrent, as well as emerging challenges in marine and coastal ecosystem management. She welcomed the Abidjan Convention's renewed commitment to tackling environmental pollution, invasive alien species, ocean acidification and climate change.



Rejoice Mabudafhasi, Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, South Africa, and Chair of the Abidjan Convention Bureau

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Chair Mabudafhasi introduced the agenda (UNEP/DEPI/WAF/BUR.1) and it was approved without amendment.

REPORT ON THE REVITALIZATION PROCESS

Ibrahim Thiaw, presented the report on the revitalization process. He highlighted a recent study undertaken by UNEP with contracting parties and partner institutions that: reviewed the convention's mandate, including upgrading the Regional Coordinating Unit in Cote d'Ivoire into a fully-fledged Secretariat; analyzed the general trust fund and the difficulties experienced by contracting parties in making financial contributions; assessed cooperation with partners in the region; and made recommendations to facilitate ratification by contracting parties. Thiaw called for strengthening operational links among programmes and secretariats working on related activities in the region to avoid duplication. He introduced the draft decisions for consideration by delegates and highlighted the importance of a meaningful outcome.

PRESENTATION AND ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT DECISIONS ON THE REVITALIZATION PROCESS

The First Vice-Chair of the Abidjan Convention Bureau, Momodou Cham, Gambia, introduced seven draft decisions on the revitalization of the Abidjan Convention for consideration. The preambular paragraphs, recalling relevant COP decisions and the steps taken in the revitalization process were adopted without amendments. The draft decisions on: enhancing institutional arrangements and collaboration for the Abidjan Convention; strategies for ratification/accession of the Convention; and review of the title, mandate and objectives of the Convention, were adopted with minor amendments.

Daniel Aka Ahizi, Minister for Environment, Forests and Water Resources, Cote d'Ivoire, reaffirmed his country's commitment to host the Secretariat, and assured delegates that arrangements for the handover are in place. Vice-Chair Cham noted the delegates' appreciation and the decision was adopted with a minor amendment.

On strategies for improving contributions to the West and Central African Trust Fund, the Bureau undertook to investigate why some country contributions had not been reflected in its report and the decision was accepted without amendments.

With regard to strengthening the roles of National Focal Points, some delegates questioned references to multi sectoral national committees and the need to appoint "sufficiently senior officials" as National Focal Points. The Bureau explained that the draft decision seeks to avoid duplication of coordination structures, foster efficient decision making, and address the lack of momentum that has previously hindered the implementation of the Convention. This decision and the draft decision on the Action Plan for the Revitalization of the Abidjan Convention were accepted without amendment.

CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

Chair Mabudafhasi, congratulated delegates on the outcomes of the extraordinary meeting. Many delegates expressed satisfaction, and thanked South Africa for hosting the meeting, Côte d'Ivoire for offering to host the new Secretariat, and the UNEP Executive Director for support during the revitalization process. Angola informed that it expected to complete its ratification process by the end of the year. IUCN reaffirmed its commitment to the Convention as an implementing partner, and the AU looked forward to links between its subregional programmes and the Abidjan Convention.

Achim Steiner congratulated delegates for their efforts to initiate "a renaissance" of the Abidjan Convention. He reiterated UNEP's commitment to the process and underscored the role of the AU in pan-African environmental governance. He expressed hope that the Bamako Convention and other regional instruments would be similarly revitalized. Noting parallel processes addressing interlinked coastal and marine issues, he called for enhanced synergies to ensure initiatives are coherent and effective. He also paid tribute to the Bureau Chair, Rejoice Mabudafhasi, for her personal engagement in the revitalization process.

Chair Mabudafhasi paid tribute to UNEP and contracting parties for their support towards the successful conclusion of the process, and expressed thanks to parties for embracing South Africa as a member of the Convention as reflected in the amended title. She closed the meeting at 10:56 am.



LAUNCH OF ATLAS OF OUR CHANGING ENVIRONMENT



L-R: Achim Steiner and H.E. André Okombi Salissa (Republic of Congo) outgoing president of AMCEN, officially launching Africa: Atlas of our Changing Environment, during the opening ceremony of AMCEN-12.

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) launched the publication *Africa: Atlas of Our Changing Environment*. The *Atlas* is a complementary publication to the Africa Environment Outlook report, a flagship publication of AMCEN. It is the first fully comprehensive publication which depicts environmental change in all African countries in a single consolidated report. Through a combination of satellite images, graphs, maps and photographs, the *Atlas* provides visual scientific evidence of changes taking place on the African landscape. It illustrates the environmental challenges facing Africans and the need for urgent action.

