

**Speech**  
**At UNEP/Government of Germany reception: 40 Years of Action - UNEP**  
**Regional Seas**  
**By**  
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Distinguished guests, experts and participants,

I am pleased and honoured to welcome you, on behalf of the United Nations Environment Programme, at this reception to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UNEP Regional Seas Programme, that we host together with the Federal Government of Germany on the grounds of the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies.

UNEP was established as the result of the United Nations Conference on Human Development in 1972 in Stockholm. The Conference recommended that Governments take early action to adopt “effective national measures for the control of all significant sources of marine pollution, including land-based sources, and concert and co-ordinate their actions regionally and where appropriate on a wider international basis” (Recommendation 92). The subsequent meetings of the UNEP Governing Council repeatedly endorsed the regional approach and requested the development of regional action plans for the parts of the ocean where such plans do not yet exist. This was the origin of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme.

As clearly indicated in the mandate from the governments, UNEP focused on the parts of the world where regional programmes did not exist. There are several areas where regional cooperative programmes existed and UNEP followed good examples which were available 40 years ago. The first ever regional agreement on marine pollution and the environment, the Bonn Agreement, was adopted and signed in Bonn in 1969, stipulating regional cooperation in dealing with pollution of the North Sea by oil. This agreement was triggered by the accident of the oil tanker "Torrey Canyon" which broke up off Cornwall in 1967 spilling 117,000 tonnes of oil. UNEP Regional Seas Programme drew many lessons from the negotiation and implementation of the Bonn Agreement. Celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme in Germany where the first regional approach to protection of the marine environment was born, is therefore very appropriate.

Starting from the pollution abatement, the Regional Seas Programme evolved in the last four decades to incorporate regular monitoring and assessment, Land-based and sea-based sources of pollution, Specially Protected Areas and biodiversity, oil spill

contingency/recovery plans, coastal habitat management, Integrated Coastal Zone Management, marine litter, and legal and institutional frameworks.

I can now safely say that the Regional Seas Programme has evolved to face the ambitious goal set in the Rio+20, which is "to protect, and restore, the health, productivity and resilience of oceans and marine ecosystems, and to maintain their biodiversity, enabling their conservation and sustainable use for present and future generations, and to effectively apply an ecosystem approach and the precautionary approach in the management, in accordance with international law, of activities having an impact on the marine environment, to deliver on all three dimensions of sustainable development." (See paragraph 158 of "the Future We Want" document)

To date, UNEP Regional Seas Programme, under UNEP's coordination, encompasses 143 countries participating in 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans. However, this is not the final destination of our journey. There remains a large area of oceans not covered by regional seas conventions and action plans. 64% of the ocean is classified as areas beyond national jurisdiction. As recognized in the Rio+20, there are so many emerging issues that affect the health, productivity and resilience of the ocean. These issues include climate change, ocean-based food security, natural disasters, impacts of off shore oil and gas exploration and extraction, and exploitation of ocean energy.

The Regional Seas Programme is invited to the table, where approach to facing these emerging issues should be defined. An inclusive Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication was given the green light in Rio+20 as an important tool for realizing a sustainable future. Ecosystem and precautionary approaches are well developed and need to be embedded also by the Regional Seas Programme. These emerging challenges will define the future pathway of the Regional Seas Programme in the years to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to turn briefly to themes of the Workshop - Ocean Governance.

The UNEP Regional Seas Conventions and Actions Plans are an integral part of a platform for sustainable development at regional level and as part of strengthening UNEP's delivery at the regional level, in line with the Rio+20 Summit mandate. In this context, this Programme is set to provide an important contribution towards the development and future monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals.

I strongly believe that in the last 40 years, the international community has proved that a regional approach is effective and the right mechanism to address the issues related to shared marine resources and common marine environment. I am proud to

report about the wealth of work done by the member countries of regional seas conventions and action plans towards achieving global and regional environmental benefits for the welfare of the people living in the coastal areas but also in the hinterlands.

Based on the proven success of the regional approach under the Regional Seas Programme, this approach may also be further built upon in the current discussion on marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. I am therefore glad to see that our joint experience with the regional approach is also being considered in this workshop.

Human extractive activities have become very significant to the marine environment. These may entail deep sea bed mining, onshore and offshore oil and gas extraction, and coastal sand extraction. Many of us are concerned about possible impacts of these activities on the environment and some regional seas conventions have started to look at options for addressing this trend.

In conclusion, the Regional Seas Programme continues to be relevant to the topics of the Workshop and other emerging issues. The Workshop results indeed can chart the direction in which the future Regional Seas Programme moves. Two years ago, when we celebrated the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations Environment Programme, the 2012 Rio+20 conference gave UNEP a renewed and upgraded mandate as a birthday gift but also as a commitment. The Regional Seas Programme, entering its fifth decade, is also open to new challenges relating to the management of our global marine commons.