

FINAL SPEECH:

Dr. Susan Gardner, Director Ecosystems Division

National Focal Point Meeting on 21 August 2024 in Antananarivo, Madagascar

**Thank you, Chair;
Excellencies, delegates, friends,**

Our gratitude, Secretary General, to you and the Government of Madagascar for hosting this COP, in this beautiful country and biodiversity hotspot of such unique and profound importance.

How wonderful it is to be together in person, for the first time since 2018 and to take stock of how far we have come.

Since COP 10, there has been good progress on a number of fronts, important regional processes have been completed and will be presented to the COP for approval tomorrow.

This meeting provides an opportunity for connection on our shared goals. Secretary General said yesterday coming together for “Collective action on common objectives;” Contracting Parties, international and regional organizations, civil society,

For us all to, once again, connect on a common ocean agenda for the Western Indian Ocean region.

And now, is a critical moment.

International ocean policy and governance is undergoing rapid evolution, with a number of important agreements recently reached or in progress, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework; the Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ); Progress on a legally binding instrument to address plastic pollution

And with this progress, the work of the Nairobi Convention has evolved with it to stretch to the ambition of these multilateral advancements, serving as the foundation of the next Programme of Work that will be considered this week for adoption.

The Nairobi Convention and the RSCAPs can play a critical role in implementing these agreements, leveraging our long experience of regional cooperation on ocean governance, and applying what we have learned from Regional Seas over 50 years in areas of national jurisdiction, to areas *beyond* national jurisdiction.

We note that the Programme of Work is informed by a new and ambitious regional integrated programme running for 10 years from 2025 – 2035 responding to the request from Contracting Parties at COP 9 to develop a more integrated approach out of the two Transboundary Diagnostic Analyses (TDA) and their respective Strategic Action Programmes (SAPs).

We congratulate the Contracting Parties and partners for the significant progress made in implementing the decisions taken at COP 10. Progress that has been reflected in the UNEP Executive Director's report on areas including: Guidelines on critical habitat restoration; The Marine Protected Areas Outlook; Strategies on: Marine Spatial Planning, Ocean Governance, Information Management; The Framework for Marine Ecosystem Monitoring; The Water Quality Management Framework and guidelines; and the Toolkit for Green Ports Development.

And we congratulate Contracting Parties for the latest milestone, the adoption of a legally binding Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management of the Western Indian Ocean in September 2023 in Antananarivo, Madagascar and becoming the 4th protocol of the Nairobi Convention.

UNEP is committed to supporting Contracting Parties to build their capacity to fast-track ratification and entry into force of this new protocol.

We understand that all of these products have involved extensive country level consultations, largely through the system of invaluable Nairobi Convention Focal Points.

Today's proceedings present an opportunity for further discussions with Focal Points in preparation for the Heads of Delegations meeting tomorrow.

The Focal Points are the entry points into countries of the region. They provide the vital function of ensuring ownership of Nairobi Convention activities at country level.

We thank the focal points for their dedicated work throughout the intercessional period, enabling the Convention to evolve into one of the leading Regional Seas Programmes globally.

I am delighted to join you and the entire Nairobi Convention family at this COP 11, and on behalf of UNEP, we stand ready to support countries of the Western Indian Ocean in your efforts to ensure a healthy and productive coastal and marine ecosystem in this region and beyond Today, and for the next generation.

Thank you.