

## Talking Points for Opening Remarks by Deputy Executive Director of UNEP to Heads of Delegations at COP 11 on 22 August 2024

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished delegates, and esteemed colleagues,

We gather today at a critical time. Our discussions and decisions are significant not just for our region, but for the global commitments and agreements aimed at addressing the triple planetary crisis of **climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution**.

Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, like the Nairobi Convention, are instrumental in translating UNEP's global mandate into actionable solutions at the regional level, particularly for our ocean environments. This was reaffirmed by **UNEA resolution 6/15**, which called for strengthened efforts to tackle climate change, marine biodiversity loss, and pollution, and underscored the importance of the Regional Seas Programme as a vital mechanism to do this.

UNEP proudly hosts 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans with over 146 countries participating.

As we reflect on the numerous global processes currently shaping our environmental landscape – from the **Decade of Ocean Science** and **Decade of Ecosystem Restoration**, to the ongoing negotiations for a binding **treaty on plastic pollution** – it's clear that the Nairobi Convention plays a pivotal role. Over the past three years, Convention Secretariat has been working with regional experts, stakeholders, and potential financial partners to co-create an integrated Programme to guide our activities going forward. This forms the basis of the Programme of **Work, 2025 to 2028**, which will be presented at this COP for approval and adoption.

The Integrated Programme is not just a plan; it is a comprehensive framework that aligns global policies and agreements with our regional priorities. It encompasses five key components:

- Improved Ocean Governance
- Area-based Planning and the Circular Economy
- Enhanced Environmental and Water Quality
- Biodiversity Conservation, and
- Regional Coordination and Information Sharing.

These components reflect the collective priorities identified by our Contracting Parties and stakeholders and will serve as a roadmap for engaging development partners and financial institutions in our shared goal of a healthier, more productive, and sustainable Western Indian Ocean.

The combined economic value of the ecosystems in this region is estimated at over **20 billion US dollars per year**, with a total asset base of **over 333 billion**. More than **30 percent of the 60 million people** of this region live **within 100km of the coast**. So enhancing conservation and management of coastal and marine ecosystems protects livelihoods and income for communities and boosts national economies.

The Western Indian Ocean region generates about **4.8% of the global fish catch**, equivalent to about **4.5 million tons** per year. **Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction** are intensively fished, by

fleets from 19 countries, only four of which – Tanzania, Seychelles, Comoros and Maldives – are from this region. The biodiversity of these areas will be protected by the **BBNJ Agreement**, adopted last year and aiming to support the Kunming-Montreal Protocol target to effectively conserve and manage 30% of land and sea by 2030. Let me mention here that there is a funding window by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) international waters to support countries with the ratification process of the BBNJ Agreement. My colleague, the Head of UNEP's GEF International Waters unit will provide further information in his statement later.

Furthermore, this Integrated Programme underpins the newly completed **Regional Ocean Governance Strategy**, which will also be presented for consideration at this COP. This strategy provides up-to-date guidance for our region and facilitates effective collaboration with our partners in the journey toward a sustainable Western Indian Ocean.

Over the last 2 days we heard how the partners of the Nairobi convention support the work and implementation of the convention and its work programme. We also saw the focal points come together to discuss and negotiate various decisions, such as on BBNJ, the Global biodiversity framework and Carbon financing.

I want to express my deep appreciation for the commitment of the Contracting Parties to strengthen the link between science and policy. The regular convening of the **Science to Policy Platform** within the Convention is a testament to our shared belief in evidence-based decision-making. The outcomes of the last Science to Policy Platform, held in Maputo in December 2023, have been instrumental in shaping the draft COP Decisions before us today.

It is our collective aspiration to build a vibrant and sustainable blue economy in the Western Indian Ocean, and the decisions we make at this COP will be vital steps toward that goal. I also look forward to seeing how the resolutions from this meeting will inform our messaging at the **Third United Nations Oceans Conference** in France next year. I am particularly excited about the UNOC3 event scheduled for later today, where we will solidify our regional message for the global stage.

Colleagues,

UNEP is proud to work for and represent the UN member states, and it is both a privilege and an honor to support the countries of this region in their ongoing efforts toward a healthier planet. Together, let us seize this moment to make meaningful progress toward our shared environmental goals.

Finally, allow me to thank our Hosts, the government of Madagascar and the Nairobi Convention Secretariat for the all the hard work that went into organizing this COP 11.

Thank you.