

## **General Statement**

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Multi Stakeholder Dialogue and Capacity Building Partnership event on the Regular Process

The Director, Division for Ocean Affairs and Law of the Sea, Co-Chairs, Distinguished delegates, I want to take this opportunity to thank the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socio-Economic Aspects for organizing this two days' Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue and Capacity Building partnership event.

In the West Africa region, the regional approach to protection of the marine environment was institutionalized by UNEP (now the UN Environment) under its Regional Seas Programme, and I am delighted that Sierra Leone is party to one of these Regional Seas Programmes, i.e. the Abidjan Convention.

Co-Chairs and Delegates, the coastal and marine environment of Sierra Leone and other countries in the Gulf of Guinea region are exposed to environmental risks resulting from pollution problems from anthropogenic activities such as dumping of domestic wastes, onshore mining, agricultural practices and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing. The beaches have also undergone intense erosion over the years.

As many speakers at this event have shown evidences that our oceans are in trouble with the advent of new technologies and human needs, but it also shows what has to be done in charting a new course that can recover our ocean life in this generation and protect our marine ecosystems for the generations to come.

In 2012, the Abidjan Convention convened a Sustainable Seas pilot workshop which recommended developing a common reporting template to be used by the 22 member states of the Abidjan Convention to report on the status of the marine environment towards the Abidjan Convention.

It was also recommended to initiate the development of the State of the Marine Environment reports in a pilot group of five member states of the Abidjan Convention, based on the developed template.

In 2013, Sierra Leone was selected as one of the five pilot countries to benefit from the Technical Assistance from Grid Arendal, Norway in undertaking this

assessment. Successfully in 2015, the first State of the Marine Environment Report was produced. We thank the Abidjan Convention and UN Environment, Grid Arendal and UNDP for their supports on this.

Even as this was completed, it is important to note that a major capacity needs facing most countries of West Africa region including Sierra Leone is the ability to carry out state of marine environment assessments at national to regional spatial scales. This is due to the lack of funding but largely to the lack of resources and capability to conduct these studies especially at the local and national levels.

Delegates, noting that Sierra Leone is aware that the future of our marine and coastal environment and its resources largely depends on reversing the ongoing trend of environmental risks as highlighted above, the current Government has taken environmental management and conservation as priority and we already have the framework in mainstreaming regional initiatives in our national development programmes which embraces sustainable natural resources management and promoting sound environmental governance.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we note that, in the context of global environmental governance and cooperation, the regional level represents a critical middle ground between the global and national levels. Thus optimizing the coordination of marine environmental data collection activities of least developed countries and within the regions remains prudent and should be considered to address the gaps and impediments to the production of an integrated marine assessment.

By this, Sierra Leone and other least developed Countries look forward to capable institutions for multiple rings of cooperation, capacity building and sharing of knowledge in the area of marine environmental assessments.

I thank you all for your kind attention.