



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Caribbean recognises International Day For Biodiversity



Kingston, May 22: “Island Biodiversity” is the theme for this year’s International Day For Biological Diversity. This day is observed annually on May 22 and for 2014 aims to raise awareness on the importance of biodiversity for islands and the need for island states to sustainably manage their resources.

“Islands are home for more than six hundred million people around the world and are rich in biological diversity” (Convention on Biological Diversity). In fact, the Wider Caribbean Region (Caribbean, and Latin American countries with Caribbean coastlines) is listed as one of four biodiversity hot spots in the world with over fifty percent of species listed as endemic or unique to the region. Biodiversity contributes significantly to food security, livelihoods and economies of these islands, many of which are Small Island Developing States (SIDS). In fact, data from the UNSIDS website confirms that healthy coral reefs generate an estimated USD 375 billion dollars in goods and services annually. However, globally, natural resources on islands are being reduced at alarming rates due to pollution, climate change and unsustainable practices including overfishing, unsustainable farming and uncontrolled coastal development. Islands in the Caribbean are no exception. Given their geographic isolation and, in some cases, remoteness from larger land masses, millions of islanders are particularly dependent on their natural resources, for their food and livelihoods.

Increasing threats to the natural resources of the world’s islands, especially SIDS, as a result, contributes to food insecurity and a decrease in viable employment. There is a critical need to recognise the value of these resources and to promote more bold actions towards their sustainable use and conservation.

This year, to highlight “Island Biodiversity”, the Caribbean Environment Programme of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP - CEP) will host a regional photo competition through its Facebook and Twitter pages under the theme “**Biodiversity through your eyes**”, with emphasis on how biodiversity sustains livelihoods.

Alessandra Vanzella-Khoury, Programme Officer for the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) sub-programme at UNEP-CEP, noted that SPAW remains committed to helping countries across the Wider Caribbean Region to conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity, which is the backbone of the region’s economies. SPAW successfully meets its conservation objectives by partnering with governments, multilateral organizations, civil society and other stakeholder groups on several projects and activities which invest in the management of marine protected areas, build local and national capacities to support sustainable management, and protect vulnerable marine mammals, threatened and endangered species such as sea turtles, the West Indian manatee and Caribbean birds. Caribbean Governments that are a part of the regional Caribbean Challenge Initiative (CCI) partner with UNEP-CEP, The Nature Conservancy, the Global Island Partnership (GLISPA) and other stakeholders including the private sector to protect and sustainably manage 20% of their marine environment by 2020 which is one of the two overarching goals of the CCI. .

Island Bright Spot is an effort that works to showcase effective conservation and island biodiversity across the globe. In a publication released today, by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to celebrate the International Day of Biological Diversity, the CCI was highlighted as an Island Bright Spot for the great work it has done so far in supporting marine and coastal conservation through collaborative action and the creation of sustainable financing mechanisms in the Caribbean.

UNEP-CEP’s Christopher Corbin noted. that within the Caribbean, the main sources of marine pollution are sewage, oil, sediments, nutrients, pesticides, solid waste, marine debris, and toxic substances. The ecological health of marine and coastal resources as well as people's ability to use areas for cultural, economic and recreational purposes, in particular for SIDS are restricted by polluting impacts. Regional projects and activities taking place within the framework of UNEP-CEP legal agreements on Land Based Sources of Marine Pollution and Oil Spills support the SPAW sub-programme in maintaining the value of biodiversity in Caribbean SIDS.

Nelson Andrade Colmenares, Coordinator for UNEP-CEP stated that he was happy that “Island Biodiversity” was chosen as the theme for this year as it will bring the world’s attention to the importance of these fragile and increasingly threatened ecosystems and will hopefully galvanise international support to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in protecting them.

The celebration of “Island Biodiversity” is also timely as the United Nations has declared 2014 as the International Year of Small Island Developing States to celebrate the contributions that this group of countries makes to the world.

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About UNEP’s Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP)

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) established the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP) in 1981 under the framework of its Regional Seas Programme. It was developed taking into consideration the importance and value of the Wider Caribbean Region’s fragile and vulnerable coastal and marine ecosystems, including an abundance of mainly endemic flora and fauna. A Caribbean Action Plan was adopted by the Countries of the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR) and that led to the development and adoption of the Cartagena Convention on 24 March 1983. This Convention is the first regionally binding treaty of its kind that seeks to protect and develop the marine environment of the WCR. Since its entry into force on 11 October 1986, 25 of the 28 Wider Caribbean Region countries have become contracting parties.

The Convention is supported by three Protocols:

- *Protocol concerning Cooperation in combating Oil Spills, which entered into force on October 11, 1986;*
- *Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW), which entered into force on June 18, 2000;*
- *Protocol concerning Pollution from Land-based sources and activities (LBS), which entered into force on August 13, 2010.*

In addition, each Protocol is served by a Regional Activity Centre (RAC). These centres are based in Curacao (Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Information and Training Centre for the Wider Caribbean, RAC/REMPEITC) for the Oil Spills Protocol; in Guadeloupe (RAC/SPAW RAC for the SPAW Protocol and in Cuba, Centre of Engineering and Environmental Management of Coasts and Bays and in Trinidad & Tobago, the Institute of Marine Affairs, both for the LBS Protocol. As they endeavour to protect the Caribbean Sea and sustain our future, we look forward to their continued effort to preserve our Caribbean Sea by facilitating the implementation of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols in the Wider Caribbean Region.

The Regional Coordinating Unit (UNEP-CAR/RCU), established in 1986, serves as the Secretariat to the Cartagena Convention and is based in Kingston, Jamaica.

To find out more about the UNEP CAR-RCU and the SPAWProtocol, please visit the www.cep.unep.org