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## **Governments of the Wider Caribbean Region commit to improve the management of their coastal and marine resources and strengthen regional cooperation.**

**Kingston, Jamaica. 17<sup>th</sup> June 2019.** From 3<sup>rd</sup> -6<sup>th</sup> June 2019, over 80 regional and international experts including government officials, non-governmental organizations, development partners and United Nations (UN) agencies met in Honduras to review the achievements of the Cartagena Convention Secretariat over the last two years (2017-2018) and to agree on priorities for the 2019-2020 biennium.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region, as well as the 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Meetings of the Contracting Parties to the Protocols Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (or Pollution Protocol) and Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (or Marine Biodiversity Protocol), respectively, were hosted by the Government of Honduras in Roatan. This marked the first time a Central American country hosted all three intergovernmental meetings of the UN Environment-administered Secretariat.

The Caribbean region is one of the most interconnected and dynamic environments in the world, with multiple socio-economic and ecological benefits derived from diverse economies, cultures and ecosystems. According to Patil et al. (2016) in the World Bank report *Toward a Blue Economy: A promise for sustainable growth in the Caribbean: An overview*, the value of the ocean economy in the Caribbean has been estimated at US\$407 billion, and the ocean economy is expected to further contribute to Sustainable Development and the 2030 Agenda. To maintain the continued provision of the benefits we derive from the Caribbean Sea, the multiple impacts on marine and coastal environments need to be addressed holistically. Regional governments must take urgent action to control, reduce and prevent marine pollution including from plastics, untreated sewage and fertilizer run-off and protect their coastal and marine biodiversity such as coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds.

Speaking at the opening of the Meeting of Contracted Parties to the Marine Biodiversity Protocol on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, the Minister of the Environment of Honduras, Secretary of State Dr. José Galdames welcomed the delegates and urged them to “...*look towards the future and take concerted action so that the conservation of our seas and oceans becomes a reality and allows for development for current and future generations.*”

[Original text: “...debemos mirar hacia el futuro y actuar de manera concertada para que la conservación de nuestros mares y océanos sea una realidad y permita un desarrollo para las generaciones actuales y futuras.”

“Currently the greatest challenges are improving the institutional framework of countries and defining efficient ways to effectively conserve marine and coastal biodiversity,” he further added.

*[Original text: “Actualmente los grandes desafíos consisten en mejorar la institucionalidad en los países, fortalecer la capacidad y definir formas eficientes para una conservación efectiva de la biodiversidad marina y costera.”*

In his welcome address on behalf of the Secretariat, Mr. Christopher Corbin, Programme Officer for the Pollution and Communications Sub-Programme, highlighted that the recent development of a new strategy (2020-2030) for the Secretariat would enable it to better respond to the needs of Governments and position itself to take advantage of new and emerging opportunities.

“Our Convention has and continues to evolve...[its] three main areas- marine biodiversity, land-based pollution and oil spills [are] as relevant today as they were almost 40 years ago. However, the Convention makes no mention of ocean-based or blue economies, of microplastics, of ocean acidification, sargassum, ecosystem-based management, marine spatial planning or even climate change- issues that are now critical if we want to continue on a path towards sustainable development,” he stated.

He also thanked the Honduran Minister of the Environment, Dr. José Galdames for the hospitality and support of his government in staging these meetings for the first time. Honduras recently became a Contracting Party to the Convention and its Protocols on 13 October 2018.

Also speaking at the COP15 ceremony was Dr. Habib El-Habr, Coordinator of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities (GPA), who represented the UNEP Executive Director. He expressed UNEP’s support for the Secretariat’s updated strategy which will more closely align its work with UNEP’s strategic direction. He further urged Contracting Parties to “seriously consider the 3<sup>rd</sup> United Nations Environment Assembly’s (UNEA 3) call for wider participation in the UN Decade for Biodiversity and to fully implement the SDGs as adopted in 2015 in a comprehensive and coherent manner.”

During the Conference’s Opening Ceremony, a tribute and award presentation was made by Mr. Corbin to Lic. Antonio Villasol, retired outgoing Director of Cuba’s Centre of Engineering and Environmental Management of Coasts and Bays (CIMAB), one of two Regional Activity Centres supporting the Secretariat Pollution Sub-Programme. The Meeting recognized Mr Villasol for his sterling contribution to the Wider Caribbean Region for over 40 years.

**Some of the meeting’s achievements included the:**

- Adoption of the region’s first State of Marine Pollution Report;
- Launch of a Report on the Status of Plastics and Styrofoam Bans in the Caribbean;
- Adoption of new marine protected areas and endangered species under the Marine Biodiversity Protocol:
  - o The total number of listed species has now increased to 256 following the addition of the Largetooth sawfish (*pristis pristis*) and the Silky shark (*Carcharhinus falciformis*).
  - o The Mount Scenery National Park of Saba Island in the Caribbean Netherlands, as well as the National Natural Reserve of Kaw-Roura and the National Natural Reserve of Amana, both in French Guiana, were incorporated into the Protocol’s list of protected areas. The list now has 35 protected areas.



Participants also recognized the importance of more integrated approaches for addressing the pollution of the marine environment and the protection of coastal and marine biodiversity. This was reflected in decisions that requested the Secretariat to continue to build partnerships for improving oceans governance including through the Coordinating Mechanism established under the UNDP GEF CLME+ Project as well as with the Inter-American Sea Turtle Convention, the International Atomic Energy Agency, The Ocean Foundation, and the Caribbean Marine Environment Protection Association (CARIBMEPA).

The need to do further research on the new coral disease Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease, to establish an early warning and detection system for Sargassum, and conduct research on the impacts of ocean acidification were some of the other priority areas of concern. According to Mr. Corbin, he was extremely pleased with the participation and active engagement by Governments and committed the Secretariat to continue to work with Governments to promote ratification and implementation of the Convention and its protocols. The meeting concluded with the formal adoption of the Work Plan and Budget of the Secretariat for the 2019-2020 biennium.

#### Photos:

**Photo 1:** Group photo of delegates and Secretariat staff at the Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols. Photo source:

**Photo 2:** Mr. Christopher Corbin (left) presents an award to Lic. Antonio Villasol, retired outgoing Director of Cuba's Centre of Engineering and Environmental Management of Coasts and Bays.

**Photo 3:** Mr. Christopher Corbin welcomes delegates to the opening of the COP Meetings and to the commencement of the 10th SPAW COP.

**Photo 4:** Dr. Habib El-Habr makes his remarks during the opening of the COP Meetings. Photo credit: Ministry of the Environment of Honduras

**Photo 5:** Secretary of State and Minister of the Environment of Honduras, Dr. José Galdames addresses delegates at the official opening of the COP Meetings. Photo credit: Ministry of the Environment of Honduras

**Photo 6:** UNEP and Cartagena Convention Secretariat staff at COP.

(front row- from left): Dr. Habib El-Habr (UNEP), Ms. Isabelle Vanderbeck (UNEP), Ms. Clementiene Pinder (Cartagena Convention), Ms. Ileana López (Cartagena Convention), Ms. Tracey Tucker (Cartagena Convention)

(Cartagena Convention staff, back row- from left): Ms. Jodi Johnson, Ms. Sancha Foreman, Ms. Donna Henry-Hernandez, Mr. Christopher Corbin

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## About the Cartagena Convention

The “Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region” was adopted in 1983 in Cartagena, Colombia. Known as the “Cartagena Convention, it became legally binding in 1986.

The Convention is supported by 3 technical Protocols, or sub-agreements:

- Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Combating Oil Spills;
- Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS or Pollution Protocol)
- Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW or Biodiversity Protocol).

The Secretariat for the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols is based in Kingston, Jamaica and is supported by four specialized Regional Activity Centres (RACs). The RAC for Marine Biodiversity is hosted in Guadeloupe (SPAW RAC), the one for Oil Spills is hosted in Curacao (Regional Marine Pollution Emergency, Training and Information Centre - Caribbean) while the Institute of Marine Affairs (IMA) in Trinidad and Tobago and The Center of Engineering and Environmental Management of Coasts and Bays (CIMAB) in Cuba are the RACs for pollution.

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