

CELEBRATING "COAST DAY" IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) and the Priority Actions Programme Regional Activity Centre (PAP/RAC) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), jointly with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the Municipality of Datca-Mugla, Mugla University and Underwater Research Society, Turkey, are organising the third annual celebration of the "Coast Day" in the Mediterranean. The central event will take place in Datca-Mugla (Culture Centre of the Municipality), Turkey, on 24 October 2009. On the occasion of this year's "Coast Day", Mr. Jérôme Bignon, member of the French Parliament and politician active in the field of coastal management, will be appointed a Mediterranean Ambassador for the Coast.

The event will include organisation of a technical panel for the experts and a series of awareness-raising activities for the general public. The panel, entitled "ICZM Protocol: for a better future of our coasts" aims to promote the ratification and implementation of the Mediterranean ICZM Protocol, as well as to present the achievements of Mediterranean countries in managing their coasts. It is envisaged that the event will be attended by the representatives of the Contracting Parties, as well as by a number of experts, representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations, academy members, famous writers and TV programmers from Turkey.

The Mediterranean coastal area, a 46,000-km long chain of important and fragile ecosystems such as beaches, dunes, reefs, lagoons, swamps, estuaries, deltas and rocky shores, is one of the most important assets of the Mediterranean. However, the Mediterranean coastal area has always been an attractive area for development. The urbanisation rate in 1995 was 62%, forecasted to grow to 72% in 2025; the urbanisation rate in the north will increase only from 67% to 69%, while in the south it is expected to be from 62% to 74%. But the biggest problem in continued growth in population and infrastructure is linear nature of coastal urbanisation resulting in nearly 40% of the total length of the coastal area already being occupied.

Also, the Mediterranean Sea is one of the world's busiest waterways accounting for 15% of the global shipping activity, with transit rise projections expected to rise by 23% over the next ten years. For the Mediterranean region, climate experts anticipate, during the 21st Century, an increase in air temperature in the range of 2.2 C° to 5.1 C°, a significant decrease in rainfall, ranging from -4 and -27%, increase in drought periods, frequency and force of extreme events, such as heat waves, droughts or floods, and an increase of the sea level of up to 50 cm. All these events are likely to cause severe impacts on agriculture and fisheries, coastal infrastructure, human health and energy sector.

One of the most important steps enabling countries to better manage their coastal zones and to deal with the emerging coastal environmental challenges is the adoption of the Mediterranean ICZM Protocol. The new Protocol, which is a unique legal instrument in the entire international community, is considered to be the right path towards ensuring sustainable coastal development, as it provides an effective way of ensuring that human actions are undertaken with a concern for balancing economic, social and environmental goals and priorities in a long-term perspective.

MAP and PAP/RAC are applauding national governments of Slovenia and France for their efforts undertaken in the process of ICZM Protocol ratification. On the occasion of this year's "Coast Day", MAP and PAP/RAC are inviting the rest of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention), to follow the examples of Slovenia and France and to urgently ratify this important legal document.