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Date: October 3, 2014

UNEP CEP celebrates World Tourism Day 2014

Kingston, 3 October: “Tourism and Community Development” is the 2014 theme for World Tourism Day celebrated on September 27. Every year, World Tourism Day is celebrated to highlight tourism’s, cultural, political and economic value. This year’s theme will focus on the ability of tourism to empower people and provide them with skills to achieve change in their local communities. The Caribbean Sea is vital to tourism in the region. The white sandy beaches, pristine blue waters, sunny skies and healthy coral reefs are the bases for tourism in the Wider Caribbean. Cruise ships visiting the Caribbean, represent 34.4%¹ of the tourism market and contributes USD 2 billion² to the region annually.

The region’s natural tourism contributes USD 47.1 billion annually to Caribbean economies and accounts for 13.9% of the region’s overall GDP³. So far this year, over 14 million visitors have chosen the Caribbean as their vacation destination.⁴

Within the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR), UNEP’s Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP), through its Sub-programmes for Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) and the Assessment and Management of Environmental Pollution (AMEP) works with communities to ensure that healthy marine and coastal ecosystems are preserved.

Alessandra Vanzella- Khouri, Programme Officer for the SPAW Sub-programme, has noted that marine protected areas which include ecosystems like coral reefs are extremely important. According to the World Resources Institute, the value of coral reef ecosystems to the tourism sector in the Caribbean is estimated at USD\$663 million. The SPAW Sub-programme assists Governments in the management of marine protected areas in the WCR, including support to national and regional conservation management strategies and plans. This includes providing technical support to reef restoration programmes including installing mooring buoys to protect the coral reefs in some islands. The SPAW Sub-programme has merged tourism and community enhancement initiatives with species preservation efforts through marine mammal tours. These tours provide communities in Dominica, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent with employment opportunities for tour operators who educate on the value of the natural environment in these countries. Through a Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan executed in Grand Anse Beach, Saint Lucia, community members have been involved in the protection of the

¹ Cruise Lines International Association 2013 Travel Agent and Cruise Line Survey

² Business Research and Economic Advisors webpage

³ World Travel Tourism Council: Caribbean 2012 Annual Research: Key Facts

⁴ Caribbean Tourism Organisation: Table 1-Tourist(Stop-Over) Arrivals and Cruise Passenger Visits in 2014

seaturtles and their nesting areas by acting as tour guides and educators on the importance of protecting seaturtles and their habitats.

The AMEP Sub-programme works through their Regional Activity Centre- Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Training and Information Centre (RAC/REMPEITC-Caribe), to preserve our Caribbean Sea by preventing and responding to oil spill incidents in the marine environment. Additionally, the recently concluded Global Environment Facility/ European Union/ Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction Project in Jamaica provides another example of community based tourism development. Fisher folk and other residents of coastal communities were involved in the replanting of mangrove plants and the installation of coral reefs which contribute to the development of healthy fish sanctuaries and improve the local tourism product

UNEP CEP's involvement with local communities has aided in improving the sustainability of natural marine environments by empowering local people to become a part of conservation efforts. Unsustainable practices such as dredging, illegal sand mining, pollution and the poaching of wildlife have negatively impacted marine biodiversity and ecosystem health. Tourism and Community Development is a positive step in encouraging civic pride in the natural environment, increasing economic productivity and reducing harmful impacts to the marine environment.

UNEP CEP remains committed to protecting and developing the coastal and marine resources of the Caribbean recognizing that coastal communities are themselves an important resource. Engaging them benefits both themselves and tourism and often results in a more sustainable product part of the tourism package which is essential for development in the region.

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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 (SPA), 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/SPA RAC for the SPA 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, please visit the website at www.cep.unep.org or follow us on [Facebook](#) and/or [Twitter](#).