

Extraordinary meeting of the Contracting Parties
to the Convention for the Protection of the
Mediterranean Sea against Pollution

Geneva, 29 March - 1 April 1982

OPENING STATEMENT

by

P. S. THACHER

DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Mr. President,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the Executive Director of UNEP, and on my own behalf, I take pleasure in welcoming you all to this Extraordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention.

Ever since 1975, when the Mediterranean Action Plan was approved in Barcelona, the importance of our common task has been increasingly recognized. As the threats to the Mediterranean environment become better known, the risk of a major catastrophe, or of a slow but irreversible build-up of pollution, is perceived as intolerable by the region that gravitates around the Mediterranean. This region, one of the principal engines of the world's economy, needs a healthy Mediterranean and can well afford to protect it, instead it cannot afford not to protect it.

The meeting you are starting today must resolve several important issues in the short span of only four days. I hope I can facilitate your task by bringing you up to date on recent programme developments and by reviewing with you the four main issues requiring your decisions.

Developments since December 1981

The secretariat has made a special effort this year to prepare and distribute the working documents well ahead of the meeting. The report of the Executive Director (UNEP/IG.36/3) is dated 7 December 1981. Since that report was prepared, we were gratified to learn that Tunisia had ratified the Land Based Sources Protocol, while France, Israel, Morocco, Greece and the EEC have initiated internal approval procedures.

MED PCL-PHASE II has made further progress. The Second Meeting of the Contracting Parties (Cannes, 2-7 March 1981) approved the Long-Term Pollution Monitoring and Research Programme (MED POL - PHASE II) and therefore the Parties committed themselves to take all the necessary steps for the implementation and success of this programme. The first step was the designation by 14 Contracting Parties of their National Co-ordinators for MED PCL, and the establishment of the Working Group for Scientific and Technical Co-operation.

Monitoring: The First Meeting of the Working Group for Scientific and Technical Co-operation (Athens, 28 September - 2 October 1981) endorsed the Basic Criteria for the Implementation of the National Monitoring Programmes. Two countries (Spain, France) have already sent in preliminary monitoring proposals and a number of others, (including Cyprus, Algeria, Malta, Turkey), are in the course of preparing theirs.

Difficulties, however, appear to be encountered by some National Co-ordinators due to the complexity of their task and to the fact that they may not be receiving from their authorities the resources required for the implementation of their programme, and therefore, they are forced to rely often on only the meagre resources of the participating institutions.

Research: The First Meeting of the Working Group for Scientific and Technical Co-operation also endorsed the Basic Criteria for the Development of Research Activities. After following the procedure thereby proposed, more than 100 research proposals have been received and are being analysed by the MED UNIT and the Co-ordinating Agencies. Some of the activities proposed, although very important for the scientific understanding of the Mediterranean Sea processes, are of only marginal relevance to the Action Plan, which I am sure you will agree cannot act as a funding agency for basic research.

The experience we are obtaining in this first year will allow the MED UNIT to propose to the Working Group on Scientific and Technical Co-operation at its next meeting, a sound approach for the follow-up of the research activities in order to make them more relevant to the ultimate

aim of the environmental scientific component of the Action Plan: to assess the state of pollution, of the sources and trends of this pollution and of the impact of the pollution on human health, marine ecosystems and amenities.

I have no further developments to report on the Regional Oil Combating Centre in Malta. We hope it will be strengthened soon with the addition of the technical expert approved at Cannes.

The Blue Plan has held its Confrontation Seminar on Water Resources Management in Tunisia, at the invitation of the authorities of that country, for which I should like to thank them very much. Work on other subject areas is continuing. You will hear a report from Dr Sabiri Abdalla, the Co-ordinator of the Blue Plan.

The PAP Regional Centre has initiated its Bulletin, of which two issues have already appeared. This is a welcome tool for closer contacts and co-ordination in an area that deserves stronger support, financial and otherwise.

In one of the Priority areas, Aquaculture, the UNDP has financed the preparatory assistance to a Mediterranean Regional Aquaculture Project (MEDRAP) executed by FAC. The total cost of the project is expected to be 12,454,000. Mr Ferlin of France is the project manager headquartered in Tunis.

UNDP has also financed a project with IMCO concerning port reception facilities in Libya, Malta, Yugoslavia, Tunisia, Algeria and inviting these countries to facilitate the work of the technical missions as much as possible. A similar project, announced at Cannes, has been launched with support from the EEC and Italy.

The Unit has intensified its contacts with your Bureau. After the meeting of 28 September 1981, referred to in the E.D. Report, three more meetings took place on 17-18 December 1981, on 12-13 February 1982 and on 28 March 1982, that is yesterday afternoon.

Through such meetings, supplemented by further direct contacts with you, Mr. President, and other members of the Bureau, the Unit is genuinely working hand in hand with the representatives of the Contracting Parties. This itself should facilitate your work at this meeting.

The report of the Bureau meeting has been circulated. Document UNEP/BUR/10 contains several important suggestions relevant to your agenda.

Concerning the Co-ordinating Unit of the Mediterranean Action Plan, and with the approval of the Bureau, the Executive Director has lifted his self-imposed embargo on the filling of the post of Programme Officer (Economist) which you approved at Cannes. Countries are being requested to submit candidates, we hope to go to Athens with a more equitable geographical distribution in the Unit's staff. Your Bureau has also endorsed our recommendation that the post of Junior Marine Scientist should be retained.

I have now great pleasure in expressing to the Government of Greece our deep gratitude for having signed with the United Nations the Agreement concerning the establishment in Athens of the Headquarters of the Co-ordinating Unit, for having placed at our disposal the office space offered two years ago and for having deposited in the name of UNEP the equivalent of \$400,000 in drachmas. This was done with exemplary speed and generosity and augurs well for our future relations with the host country. As soon as some practical matters are attended to (some internal re-arrangements, the purchase of equipment and furniture, telephone and telex connexions) which are needed for the office to operate, the Unit will move to Athens where we hope to mark the opening with a suitable ceremony.

Turning now to financial matters, I have good news to report. The Community has approved a major increase in its level of contribution from 50 to 460 thousand dollars which we expect to receive any day now. Italy's 1981 and 1982 contributions have cleared the House of Representatives and are now, with an accelerated procedure, before the Senate. France, as you know, provided the main financial support for the Action Plan during the difficult period of 1981. Special thanks are due to France for that support, which we trust will continue now and in the future.

A number of payments have been received since the list of contributions appeared in document UNEP/IG.36/3 Annex III: from Egypt, Israel and Turkey. Italy has made a contribution of \$50,660 in addition to its 1981 pledge. I thank its government for this gesture which sets a welcome precedent.

We have also received indications of forthcoming payments by France, Italy, Libya, Spain and Yugoslavia. I hope these indications may be confirmed by delegations here.

There are other developments as well which allow us to look at the financial situation with renewed optimism. The 1981 accounts which were closed a week ago, show bank interest at a higher level than had been prudently anticipated. This means that we can safely project them at the same level for 1982 and 1983 and therefore increase resources available for programming. At the same time the stop-go operations of last year and the severe financial difficulties resulted in lower expenditures.

As a result of these developments we are now submitting revised programme proposals in document UNEP/IG.36/3 Rev.1. The document was prepared over the last few days and is only available in English and French.

The revised proposals reflect an increase in the installation costs of the unit in Athens, which will now include a fully equipped meeting room on the premises.

The proposal also sets aside a sum of \$260,000 of which 30% is payable in drachmas, to cover the first six months' salaries of the staff in 1984 to enable the transfer of staff to Athens for an initial period of two years. This amount will then be deducted from the 1984 budget which you will adopt at your next ordinary meeting in February 1983 in Yugoslavia.

The budget estimates leave a projected balance of \$416,000 in 1982. You may decide to retain it or may use it in part if you decide to strengthen some of the programme components without having to make corresponding cuts in other areas.

The Mediterranean Action Plan continues to benefit, as in the past, from the support of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system. Their presence here, and in the planning, co-ordinating and support of the MED POL Programme, is a guarantee of the highest professional standards and of world-wide experience. In keeping with past practice, the programme supports financially the experts appointed by WHO, FAO and IAEA. We consider that this remains the most economical source of the specialized and varied expertise required for the proper co-ordination of MED POL, until the Governing Bodies include the protection of the Mediterranean among their responsibilities and provide for it in their respective budgets. This can only be achieved by the Mediterranean countries working in concert in those Governing Bodies.

Non-governmental organizations outside the UN system also continue to play a key role in the programme:

The Interparliamentary Union, whose meeting in 1974 in the Italian Parliament provided a strong incentive to the Action Plan, has continued to endorse it through its Sub-committee for the study of the means to combat pollution of the Mediterranean Sea. The recommendations adopted by the Sub-Committee at Palma de Majorca on 1-3 March 1982 have been made available to this meeting.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) continues to provide its invaluable expertise and will again assist you when you discuss the draft Protocol on Specially Protected Areas. The International Juridical Organization, the International Committee of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Rotary Club International, and the Association of Mediterranean Towns, have all offered to assist the Programme within their spheres of competence. As many of you are aware, the Council of Europe also has an active programme for Mediterranean coastal regions.

The authorities responsible for the three major rivers of the Mediterranean - the Po, the Rhône and the Nile - have started, under UNESCO sponsorship and with support from Italy, an interesting programme of co-operation aimed at controlling river-borne pollution. This fits well with the requirements of the land-based sources protocol and we hope such useful co-operation can be strengthened and extended to other rivers.

The sub-regional agreement for the Ligurian Sea (RAMOGE) entered into force on 1 January 1982 between France, Monaco and Italy. We understand that another such programme may be negotiated in the near future covering the central Mediterranean.

We welcome such developments because they signify the active interest and willingness of Parties to deal with specific problems of various parts of the Mediterranean as foreseen by Article 3 of the Barcelona Convention and because they reinforce and do not compete for scarce resources or compete with the Action Plan your Governments have approved.

In the same spirit, we welcome the intention of ALECSO to intensify a programme for its member states bordering on the Mediterranean. If invited, we are prepared to participate in the meeting later this year, provide information on on-going programmes and suggestions for strengthening the participation of such states in the protection of the Mediterranean Sea in the framework of the Barcelona Convention.

I have thus completed the programme review and brought you up to date on recent developments.

Issues before the Extraordinary Meeting

I now wish to turn to the main issues before this meeting.

(i) 1982-1983 budget

Item 4(a) of the Agenda deals with the proposed work programme and budget for 1982-1983. You will recall that at your meeting in Cannes, there remained a \$185,000 deficit in the 1982 budget, and that consensus could not be reached on the 1983 budget.

The proposals before you, in document UNEP/IG.36/4 Rev.1, do not depart in the main from the previous proposals. They reflect, however, the changed circumstances, in particular the delayed transfer of the Unit to Athens, your decision not to pursue for the time being the proposal of a loan, the actual level of UNEP's contribution, and our uncertainty about the year to which the Greek special contribution applies. I am sure the Greek representative will be in a position to clarify this last point.

The cost of the 1982 programme has been reduced from \$3,822,000, approved in principle at Cannes, to \$3,319,000. The cost of the 1983 programme is proposed at \$3,594,000. Both are balanced budgets, based on a realistic estimation of the financial resources expected to be available to us. There are other means to channel additional resources and support to the programme; they were suggested by your Bureau and are described in a document before you (UNEP/IG.36/INF.4).

While presenting a balanced and conservative budget with some cash to spare, I am bound to call your attention to the effects of inflation on the purchasing power of our resources. A simple survey shows that since 1979, when you adopted the first Mediterranean Budget, inflation has moved at between 15 and 25 per cent per annum in most countries. As a result, between 1979 and 1982 prices have doubled. If you want an effective programme, if you want to expand it, you should seriously consider this point. Your comments during the debate will be welcome.

(ii) Apportionment of contributions

The second point for discussion is contained in item 5 of your Agenda, on apportionment of contributions.

At the meeting in Cannes, two Governments made separate proposals, different in their form, but identical in their purpose. Their purpose was to ensure a minimum contribution from each country, before the UN scale of assessment is applied.

The secretariat takes no stand on this issue, but wishes to remind you that in every other regional seas programme the apportionment adopted by common consent, departs from the straight application of the UN scale.

(iii) Alternative arrangements for the management of MAP resources

The possibility of administering the resources of the Action Plan in a manner different from UNEP's was first raised at your meeting in Cannes. It was subsequently discussed within your Bureau and it was reviewed by UNEP with an open mind.

As a result of that review, I have to state very clearly that UNEP, and its staff, must operate exclusively within the legal framework as defined by its financial rules and regulations, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. They constitute a complete, reliable and well-tested system, providing for necessary controls and internal checks and balances.

It has been claimed that this system is cumbersome and slow. We believe that, when millions of dollars of public funds are involved, millions contributed by your Governments, speed in spending is not a virtue, nor is deliberation a capital sin. Your own Bureau has recognized and praised our prudent approach to management.

It has been further claimed that administration by UNEP is costly. We believe that this is simply not true. The administrative charges of 13 per cent do not cover the full cost of the administration services provided, which include project management, personnel administration, accounting, reporting, internal and external auditing. Major international research organizations apply, as a rule, overhead charges of 100 per cent.

Furthermore, I can state that not one dollar of your contributions, from 1979 to this day, has been used for UNEP administrative expenses. Not one dollar. Administrative expenses have all been covered by bank interest earned.

We are convinced that any other management style, by accelerating expenditures, would considerably reduce interest income and leave less, not more, available for programme expenses.

Needless to say, the Contracting Parties are at liberty to set up any alternative or parallel system for the investment and commitment of their funds. However, neither UNEP, nor for that matter the Secretary-General of the United Nations, has authority to allow its officials,

in this case the Co-ordinator of the Mediterranean Action Plan and his colleagues, to become involved in the management of resources, signing of contracts or agreements, control of their execution and accounts, except in the manner provided by the relevant United Nations rules.

Such responsibility for a separate fund can only be undertaken outside the Mediterranean Unit, by an ad hoc unit placed under the control of the Bureau, or by one Party on behalf of all the others.

While precedents exist for this type of structure created to service intergovernmental co-operation (such as the secretariats of certain conventions), there is no precedent that we know of a dual structure (UNEP and its Med Co-ordinating Unit on one side, a separate fund and administration on the other) set up to implement the same Action Plan, on behalf of the same Contracting Parties.

It is for this meeting to debate the matter further and decide, so that I may inform the forthcoming 10th session of the Governing Council whether the Mediterranean Trust Fund is to be terminated or extended at the end of this year.

(iv) Protocol on Mediterranean Specially Protected Areas

This important document is to be reviewed by you under item 6 of the agenda. It is the result of an inter-governmental meeting held in Athens in October 1980. At Cannes it was found sufficiently

advanced to be submitted to this meeting and, immediately following to the Conference of Plenipotentiaries that opens in this room on Friday. The protocol was also checked for consistency in the English, French, Spanish and Arabic texts by a legal review group, presided over by Mr. Surbiguet.

This document is important in itself because it will encourage the setting up of protected areas where such are needed. It provides objective criteria to ensure that only those areas that are needed and can be managed properly receive the necessary protection.

This protocol fulfils another commitment written in the Action Plan. By giving our programme a more balanced image, it is sure to attract additional support. I, therefore, hope that your meeting will be able to provide the Conference of Plenipotentiaries with an agreed text of the protocol.

This brings me to the end of my review of the four main issues awaiting your decision.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the difficulties presented in some issues before this meeting, I am confident that, in the tradition of Mediterranean meetings, your decisions will be taken by consensus.

As I mentioned earlier, all recent developments are positive, yet major challenges remain:-

- how to provide contributions more regularly and on a timely basis in order to meet financial obligations and allow more efficient advance planning and management of the resources your Governments made available;
- how to respond, directly or indirectly, to the requirements of the legal, MED POL, and environmental management components of the Action Plan as they develop;
- how to develop new legal instruments on off-shore exploration and on the Interstate Guarantee Fund;
- how to develop other important elements foreseen in the Action Plan, particularly training, exchange of information, public information, as well as the technological and economic aspects of marine and coastal area protection.

We in UNEP are proud of the achievements of the Mediterranean Programme and our Governing Council has repeatedly singled it out as a model operation.

Three weeks ago I convened a meeting of some 20 governments in Rarotonga, capital of the Cook Islands, at the conclusion of which they approved a Regional Seas Action Plan for the South Pacific. This brings

the number of Governments who are served by Regional Seas Action Plans - each modeled on our experience here in the Mediterranean - to a total of 110 !

UNEP's resources, which are now under very severe constraints, are increasingly shared with those countries where regional seas programmes are just now getting under way and two are still being developed. We do stand ready, however, to provide the Mediterranean with continual staff support, make available relevant experience from other UNEP programmes such as industry, IRPTC, environment and development, while ensuring, through the Regional Seas Programme Activity Centre, the needed coherence among the scientific components of all regional seas programmes and a continuing exchange of information so that each regional Action Plan can benefit from the experience of others.

More than ever before, the protection of the Mediterranean Sea presents an exciting challenge. I am sure you will be able to resolve the four main issues on your agenda and, through your wise counsel, carry the programme one important step forward.

I wish you success in your deliberations so that the leadership demonstrated in this "cradle of civilization" will continue to inspire other states in other regions to follow your example.