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First Meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the Guinea Current Large  
Marine Ecosystem (GCLME) Project  
Abuja, Nigeria - September 21st - 22nd 2006

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**Address by Mr. Oloche Anebi Edache**  
**Assistant Director-General/Regional Representative for Africa**  
**Regional Office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is for me a privilege and an honour to lead the FAO delegation on this auspicious occasion. I wish to say a few words on behalf of Dr Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

First of all, I wish to pay a special tribute to His Excellency, Chief Olusegun OBASANJO, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for his commitment to the success of a shared and agreed objective, namely enhancing the role of living and non-living marine resources, not only in combating hunger and poverty but also in contributing to the economic and social development of the African countries and their people.

The Food and Agriculture Organization received with great satisfaction and interest, the invitation to participate in this meeting, which is dedicated to this noble objective.

**Ladies and Gentleman,**

Africans have long been drawn to the sea and fishing. The fishing tradition has now been complemented by dredging, offshore oil and gas production and tourism. These activities have made it necessary to look at our oceans and seas in a more holistic way. An all-inclusive approach will guarantee that benefits from our seas are maximised while simultaneously protecting the marine environment and its ecosystems and ensuring the sustainability of the living marine resources.

FAO is interested in the fisheries sector and regards the development of the highly productive marine and inland ecosystems of the Gulf of Guinea as very important for the livelihoods of the populations that

depend on them. The fisheries provide many social and economic benefits, among which are food self sufficiency, food security, improvement of nutrition, and growth and diversification of exports.

Unfortunately, the activities undertaken in the Gulf of Guinea also include negative elements that cannot be ignored. They constitute serious constraints and obstacles to the enhancement and development of fisheries and aquaculture in this region. If unchecked, they can lead to serious deterioration of the ecosystems.

**Ladies and Gentleman,**

Our seas and oceans are changing. In the past, many people believed that the dimensions of the maritime spaces constituted an inexhaustible source of fish and other living resources. Over the past decades a growing body of research as well as practical experience have taught us that they are wrong. We have learnt that there are limits to the capacity of marine ecosystems to absorb the negative impacts of environmental degradation from pollution and climate change as well as those related to their utilization and exploitation. Economic growth at the expense of these ecosystems and their available resources cannot continue indefinitely. There is, thus, a compelling reason to change.

There are a number of principles and standards that countries should refer to and rely upon when defining, organizing and implementing the actions necessary to address this situation. In this context, we would recommend the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its International Plans of Action.

We hope that this meeting will be able to define a set of priority actions to appropriately respond to the fisheries sector challenges of African countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea

In this respect, we recognize the importance of the initiative taken by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, within the framework of the Guinea Large Marine Ecosystem (GCLME) project, in establishing an Interim Technical Guinea Current Commission to deal with environment and fisheries. We take good note of the objective of the Interim Guinea Current Commission to contribute to the recovery of depleted fisheries and the restoration of degraded habitats.

We would like to inform this Meeting that, as far as fisheries are concerned, there are a number of ongoing or envisaged activities that are being implemented within the framework of FAO and/or other

Regional Fisheries Bodies in managing the fisheries in the region. It will, therefore, be ideal for the Commission to collaborate with these Bodies to create and encourage fruitful synergies.

This meeting constitutes an excellent opportunity to identify, at the highest political level, priorities and directions for future action. In that context, I would like to assure you of FAO's commitment to support Member States of the Region to implement their decisions and to cooperate with the GCLME Programme in assisting the populations that depend on the ecosystems of the Gulf of Guinea.

In conclusion, I wish to express our thanks to the Government of Nigeria and its people for their warm and generous hospitality.

Thank you for your attention.