

For immediate release: October 7, 2008

Protecting West Africa's coast

Background: Against the current backdrop of rapid population growth, climate change and globalisation, pressure on West Africa's coastal resources is increasing. Although some habitats are still relatively well-preserved, a number of species are over-exploited and extractive industries and tourism are both growing apace. In the mid-1970s, several West African seaboard states began to establish marine protected areas. As a general rule, the criteria used to select these sites were linked to conservation goals, with little consideration given to the socioeconomic dimension. Later, in the 1990s, this approach became more participatory and marine protected areas took their place within a broader land-use planning perspective; they then evolved into tools for fisheries management and sustainable development. The move toward designating marine protected areas has since developed unprecedented momentum: the number of marine protected areas is on the rise and in some cases the process has been initiated by local communities.

Key issues:

- A regional marine protected area strategy was developed in 2002 and was subsequently endorsed by the Fisheries and Environment Ministers of the six countries. A joint programme, the Regional Coastal and Marine Conservation Programme, was launched in 2004, and a regional network of marine protected areas was officially set up in 2007.
- The context and the challenges to the implementation process of the regional MPA network in West Africa are divulged at the international level; sharing of experiences and information between the participants from other regions/networks will represent a unique opportunity for new partnerships between the represented institutions.
- The most innovative experiences, best practices and lessons learnt from West African marine protected areas in key areas will be presented and discussed.
- The main challenges facing the network in terms of scientifically-based representativeness and coherence will be discussed and concrete recommendations made.

When: 7 October, 2008, at 09:30-11:00 in room 131 P1

Materials for the Media: www.rampao.org

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The world's oldest and largest global environmental network, IUCN is a democratic membership union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists and experts in some 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 professional staff in 60 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world. IUCN's headquarters are located in Gland, near Geneva, in Switzerland.

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