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Legal Instruments reducing risks from offshore exploration activities and protecting the Mediterranean coasts' degradation enter into force today

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Two of the most innovative legal instruments for environmental protection in the Mediterranean, the Offshore and the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Protocols of the Barcelona Convention(1) will enter into force today.

Maria Luisa Silva Mejias, UNEP/MAP /Barcelona Convention Executive Secretary and Coordinator said: "The entry into force of these two Protocols provides the Mediterranean region with unique and powerful legal instruments to prevent and respond to environmental threats linked to offshore platforms and coastal degradation.

These developments will allow Mediterranean countries to activate a regional response mechanism in case an accident similar to the one in the Gulf of Mexico would happen, and will also allow for better preparedness and protection of our coasts against climate variability".

The Offshore Protocol(2) aims at establishing an effective management system to protect the Mediterranean Sea from pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf, the seabed and its subsoil, and organise a mutual assistance in cases of emergency. The Protocol establishes a system of authorization, monitoring and strict liability in case of damage, with a view to limit impact on natural resources, biodiversity and population.

The ICZM Protocol(3), is a key tool for 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. It also contains useful and innovative tools to help states in addressing threats to coastal areas such as the 100 meters no-building line, strategic environmental impact assessments, carrying-capacity assessments and participatory planning approaches.

The Mediterranean Action Plan is UNEP's flagship Regional Seas Programme. In spite of the difficulties and differences prevailing in the Mediterranean, for more than 35 years all the countries in the region have continuously cooperated in the framework of the Mediterranean Action Plan/Barcelona Convention for the sustainable development of the Mediterranean Sea and Coastal Region.

"The need and commitment to continue and deepen this cooperation for the benefit of our common environment and our population was never as important as it is today. I am confident that many other countries will soon follow in joining regional action against coastal degradation and offshore pollution threats", said Maria Luisa Silva.

"The Parties to the Barcelona Convention have entrusted the Secretariat with harnessing action to advance implementation of the Convention. We will continue striving to ensure that appropriate legal instruments are not only in place but are also implemented. With most of the legal instruments now in force, we will renew our efforts to support Mediterranean countries in complying with their commitments under the Barcelona Convention and its seven Protocols".

Notes to Editors:

(1) The **Barcelona Convention** is the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean, done at Barcelona on 16 February 1976, and amended on 10 June 1995 to address sustainable development challenges. All the 21 countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea and the EU are Parties to the Convention. The Barcelona Convention and its Protocols are the legal basis of the Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP), the first Regional Seas Programme developed in the framework of the United Nations Environment Programme.

(2) The **Offshore Protocol** has been ratified by Albania, Cyprus, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia.

(3) The **ICZM Protocol** has been ratified by Albania, the EU, France, Slovenia, Spain and Syria.

For more information:

www.unepmap.org