WELCOME STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE ABIDJAN CONVENTION

Hon. Minister for Salubrity, Environment and Sustainable Development of Cote d’Ivoire, Mme. Anne Desire Ouloto,
Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Heads of delegations,
Colleagues of the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations,
Dear Partners,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
All protocol observed

I am highly privileged to take the floor today and welcome the delegations from countries covered by the Abidjan Convention (Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern Africa Region) and colleagues from countries of the 5 continents.

Your massive presence here this morning is the sign of the revitalization of the Abidjan Convention which was initiated about ten years ago in 2006 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

This gives me the opportunity to pay tribute to those who made this revitalization possible.

Some of them are here with us in this room, veterans of the Abidjan Convention since the early 80s.

Unfortunately some of them have left us, may they rest in eternal peace.

I invite you to observe a minute of silence in respect to their dedication to the cause of the Abidjan Convention and the ocean debate in the region.

Thank you.

Honourable Minister, Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

We shall be spending the next three days in the framework of the experts segment which precedes the ministerial segment of the 12th Conference of the Parties to the Abidjan Convention.

Our work will be broken down as follows:

Day 1 will be devoted to a conference on the theme of COP12: “Integrated Ocean Management Policies in Africa » around which will be articulated the 10 expert’s presentations on various topics which are all related to the theme of COP12.
We will listen to presentations by not only experts from the continent but also experts from other regions of the world which are pretty much advanced in the defragmentation of the management process of their marine and coastal environmental resources.

Day 1 will also be the occasion to review and validate the Abidjan Declaration which will mark a new dawn in the history of the implementation of the Abidjan Convention and the overall ocean governance in Africa.

Days 2 and 3 will start with presentation of the Report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) on progress made in the implementation of COP11 decisions since 2015.

The Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Science and Technology will then present his report which will pave the way for the consideration by the Parties of the COP 12 draft decisions.

**Madame le ministre, Mesdames et messieurs, chers collègues,**

Bienvenus au segment des experts de la 12ème Conférence des Parties à la Convention d’Abidjan qui comme je le disais tantôt va analyser en premier ressort les projets de décision à soumettre à l’approbation des ministres et autres chefs de délégations lors de la réunion des plénipotentiaires qui se déroulera du 30 au 31 mars 2017.

Nous allons donc passer en revue 2 types de décisions. Dans un premier temps nous verrons les décisions disons d’ordre administratif telles que celle relatives au programme de travail ainsi que le budget 2017-2020. Ensuite nous allons pénétrer l’intimité des décisions disons “opérationnelles” qui si elles sont approuvées détermineront la mise en œuvre de la Convention pendant les trois prochaines années. Il s’agit du projet de décision sur la gestion intégrée des zones côtières, ii) la gestion des écosystèmes de mangroves, iii) les normes et standards environnementaux pour les activités pétrolières offshore, iv) les espèces aquatiques envahissantes, v) le commerce illégal des espèces de la faune sauvage marine et côtière, vi) la coopération transatlantique, vii) la mise sur pied d’un réseau de parlementaires et d’élus locaux pour les questions liées aux océans, viii) le forum Africain sur les océans, ix) les changements climatiques et l’érosion côtières, x) les lagunes, xi) les déchets marins, xii) la conservation et l’exploitation durable des océans, xiii) la planification urbaine des villes côtières et enfin, xiv) le potentiel énergétique du littoral Africain.

**Madame le ministre, Mesdames et messieurs, chers collègues,**

Il s’agit de thématiques particulièrement importantes pour le développement des pays de la zone de la Convention.
Comment vous l’aurez remarqué, la Convention a adopté une posture de rupture par rapport aux thèmes habituels qui portaient presqu’exclusivement sur les questions de conservation sans forcément mettre la satisfaction des besoins de développement des populations au centre du débat.

Notre souhait est d’avoir une COP de rupture, une COP qui marque la fin du processus de revitalisation et enfin une COP de l’action qui consolide la position de la Convention d’Abidjan comme l’acteur principal du débat sur les océans en Afrique de l’Ouest, Centrale et Australe.

Il s’agit d’une ambition mesurée mais importante tellement les questions de gestion durable des océans ont souvent été traitées de façon fragmentée et loin des questions de développement de nos Etats alors qu’il est impossible de dissoner les questions de pêche, d’énergie océanique, de tourisme balnéaire, d’agriculture, d’infrastructure portuaire, etc...du développement durable de nos Etats.

Honourable Minister, Ladies and gentlemen,

There is so much wealth in the marine and the coastal zone areas.

According to the World Bank: “The West African Coastal zone is the source of 56 percent of West Africa’s GDP (nominal GDP of the region was 623,491,000,000usd in 2015). It is home to most capitals, major industries, including agro-industry, fisheries, offshore petroleum exploration and production, and tourism, as well as city and seaside residences. The Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem (GCLME) in the region is one of the world’s most productive marine and coastal areas, with rich fishery resources, oil and gas reserves, precious minerals, and high coastal tourism potential. The total economic value of the environmental goods and services provided by the GCLME’s coastal and marine resources is estimated to be some US$18 billion per year.”

With all this potential wealth, I think it’s time now that we link the question of the oceans to the question of development in Africa to create more jobs and improve the livelihood of our people. I think it’s time now that we start applying the principles of blue economy in Africa.

I am among those who strongly believe that it’s possible and we can do it. Let’s do it then.

I cannot conclude without extending our thanks to all of you who’ve made the journey to Abidjan to attend this COP.

Our thanks go to our partners and donors such as the Swedish Agency for International Development without which the revitalization process would not have been possible.
We would also like to thank the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the West African Biodiversity and Climate Change project WABICC which is today among the strongest partners of the Abidjan Convention.

Our thanks also go to the United States African Command (US Africom) through the civilian environmental security program for this long, solid and fruitful collaboration.

We thank the German Federal Government, through the Ministry of Environment, Nuclear Safety and Construction, and GRID-Arendal for their support to the Abidjan Convention.

Thanks to the Mava Foundation for their support to our activities.

Thanks you, all our partners, IUCN, PRCM, WI, BI, Ocean Care, World Bank, WMU, AMWN,

Finally we would like to thank the Government and the people of Cote d’îvoire for the hospitality granted to all the participants to COP12.

I thank you for your attention and wish us all fruitful deliberations.