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**Performance of the programme of work and budget,
including implementation of the resolutions of the
Environment Assembly**

**Progress made in the implementation of resolution 2/12 on
sustainable coral reef management**

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to paragraph 15 of resolution 2/12 of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme, on sustainable coral reefs management, describes the progress made in the implementation of that resolution.

Efforts to implement resolution 2/12 have been pursued primarily through the Global Coral Reef Partnership, established in 2014 to strengthen the ecosystem-based management of coral reefs in the context of the programme of work. Those efforts have included the development of management tools and approaches to enhance the resilience of reefs to climate change; strengthen private sector stewardship and catalyse finance; improve access to data and reporting on coral reefs; and coordinate associated policy support and outreach. The present report contains a summary of the achievements and progress made in implementing the resolution, as well as recommendations and suggested further actions.

* UNEP/EA.3/1.

I. Introduction

1. Worldwide coral reef degradation increasingly threatens marine biodiversity, ecosystem service provision and economic opportunity. In resolution 2/12, the United Nations Environment Assembly called for initiatives, cooperation and commitments to conserve and sustainably manage coral reefs, including cold-water coral ecosystems and mangrove forests; recognized the need for education, capacity-building, knowledge transfer and partnerships with industry; and encouraged the adoption and implementation of integrated, ecosystem-based and comprehensive approaches, including the establishment of marine protected areas and other spatial and relevant sectoral approaches to enhance climate change resilience.

2. The Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme was requested to take action in this context, including to prepare, in collaboration with the International Coral Reef Initiative, an analysis of global and regional governance mechanisms and policy instruments relevant to coral reefs and to support the further development of coral reef indicators and regional coral reef assessments, as well as the preparation of a global report on coral reef status and trends through the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network. The present report provides a summary of the steps taken to date to deliver on the action requested in the resolution.

II. Progress in the implementation of resolution 2/12

3. An analysis of global and regional governance mechanisms and policy instruments relevant to coral reefs is currently under way with a view to examining their coverage, legal status, sectoral scope and, insofar as possible, how effectively they are implemented. Gaps are also being identified, as well as possible options for addressing them through policy and governance actions. An advisory committee is being convened and reviewers will be nominated by member States. The final analysis will be published in late 2018, with recommendations to be presented at the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, to be held in 2019.

4. The Environment Programme and the secretariat of the International Coral Reef Initiative are strengthening the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network as the world's leading data network on coral reefs. This will ensure reliability and rigour in the monitoring of and reporting on coral reefs at the global and regional levels; enhance access to data for policy development, environmental management, research and outreach; and enable Governments and other stakeholders to measure progress towards development, climate change and conservation targets. At the regional level, recommended standards for coral reef monitoring have been adopted in the Caribbean; and in the Pacific and Western Indian oceans, regional reports, to be finalized in 2017, are being prepared on coral reef status and trends on the basis of long-term coral reef monitoring data sets.

5. Tools for ecosystem-based coral reef management have been developed, and their use is supported through the regional seas programmes. A coral reef theme on the Environment Live platform¹ provides access to downscaled climate model projections of future coral bleaching conditions, as called for, inter alia, in paragraph 44 (b) of the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, and a guide to coral reef resilience assessment for decision-support has been finalized. These tools can be applied directly in marine spatial planning, marine protected area zoning and network design, and in the prioritization of pollution reduction efforts, and can also support vulnerability assessment and adaptation planning in coastal areas. New guidance on approaches to the governance of marine protected areas supports the design and implementation of more effective marine managed areas and sharing of their costs and benefits. A comprehensive training resource on marine and coastal spatial planning, entitled "Blue planning in practice", has been developed with the Blue Solutions partnership. Private sector engagement has been strengthened through an analysis of the business case for the sustainable management of coral reefs, as well as a pilot initiative in the Caribbean to structure and implement investment in sustainable coral reef management. By valuing coral reefs as an economic asset, investment in their sustainable management is leveraged, resulting in positive biodiversity and economic outcomes and enhanced delivery on international and regional commitments.

¹ See <http://environmentlive.unep.org/theme/index/19#about>.

6. The development and implementation of national and regional measures are supported through the regional seas programmes, as well as the large marine ecosystem projects funded through the Global Environment Facility in the western Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the Caribbean Sea. A small grants programme for projects that improve coral reef resilience has been launched, in collaboration with the International Coral Reef Initiative. The conservation of mangrove ecosystems and their services is also supported, including through the Blue Forests project of the Global Environment Facility and by catalysing the inclusion of mangrove forests in national action plans and strategies on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD-plus).

7. Significant progress has been made in the implementation of the Green Fins standards in seven countries in Asia, where over 500 diving and snorkelling operators now use this approach to continuously improve their business practices in order to reduce negative environmental impacts. This voluntary action by an industry that is highly dependent on coral reefs constitutes a direct, quantifiable contribution towards the attainment of Aichi Biodiversity Target 10.

8. A global outreach campaign on coral reefs is being prepared, to be launched in 2018 as part of the activities for the International Year of the Reef, declared by the International Coral Reef Initiative.²

9. Support for the activities carried out to implement the resolution is provided through extrabudgetary contributions from France, Monaco, Norway, Sweden and the United States of America. These have enabled the Environment Programme to pursue the implementation of the resolution in line with the recommendations that emanated from the consultation meeting jointly organized by Indonesia and the Environment Programme in Manado, Indonesia, on 28 and 29 June 2016. However, at current funding levels it will not be possible to deliver on all the action requested, including in relation to capacity-building, technology transfer and cold-water coral ecosystems and mangrove forests.

10. In its efforts to implement resolution 2/12, the Environment Programme is working through the Global Coral Reef Partnership, established in 2014 with the regional seas conventions and action plans, Environment Programme collaborating centres, national agencies and non-governmental organizations; and in close collaboration with the International Coral Reef Initiative. The action plan of the secretariat of the International Coral Reef Initiative for 2016-2018³ reflects the priorities identified in resolution 2/12 and engages the membership of the Initiative in its implementation.

III. Recommendations and suggested actions

11. Significant progress has been made in carrying out the action requested of the Environment Programme in the resolution, funding limitations notwithstanding. However, continued coral reef decline, including the extensive bleaching suffered by reefs around the world from 2014 to 2017, illustrates the need for redoubled efforts to sustainably manage coral reefs. Owing to their sensitivity and human dependence on them, coral reefs provide a valuable indicator system for environmental trends, and efforts to manage them sustainably can play a large part in minimizing impacts across social and ecological systems. Priority actions include:

(a) Focusing in particular on reducing pressure on and conserving coral reefs, which are relative climate change refugia, in order to support biodiversity conservation, resilience-building and adaptation;

(b) Creating an enabling policy environment for investment in the sustainable management and use of coral reefs, including the implementation of proof-of-concept and confidence-building measures to catalyse wider efforts;

(c) Strengthening the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, including the commitment to sharing data for improved reporting, as well as supporting network coordination at the global and regional levels;

(d) Undertaking broad efforts across all stakeholder groups to communicate the value of, and threats to, coral reefs and associated ecosystems in the context of the International Year of the Reef in 2018, including collaboration in the forthcoming Environment Programme coral reef outreach campaign;

² See www.icriforum.org/sites/default/files/ICRIGM31_Reco_IYOR2018_0.pdf.

³ See www.icriforum.org/sites/default/files/ICRI_Plan_Action_2016-18.pdf.

(e) Engaging in the analysis of governance mechanisms and policy instruments and following up on the findings, as appropriate, at the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, to be held in 2019.
