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GLOBAL COMMITMENT TO PROTECT MARINE ENVIRONMENT RENEWED

MONTRÉAL – Governments from around the world today renewed their commitment to fight pollution and destruction of the marine and coastal environment that result from activities on land.

The Declaration was made at the end of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) meeting on the Global Programme of Action that took place this week in Montréal, reaffirming the agreement made by 109 governments in 1995, and introducing new actions to further implement the GPA.

“We have made a firm pledge to work actively, *and co-operatively*, to improve the state of our oceans and coasts,” explained Mr. Toepfer, the Executive Director of UNEP.

“Commitment is a critical step,” he continued. “But of equal importance is the need to take action – we cannot afford the economic and social costs that can result from inaction.”

The Montréal Declaration outlines the pledge of governments to work together with industry, international organizations and other key stakeholders, to address those activities which affect the health and productivity of the world’s oceans. Over 80% of marine environment pollution is caused by land-based activities, such as sewage, run-off from agricultural and industrial sites, and habitat destruction.

The Declaration also addresses financial issues, urging the international donor community and financial institutions to support the implementation of various GPA work programmes.

The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans in Canada, the Honourable Herb Dhaliwal, officially opened the UNEP meeting on Monday, stressing Canada’s support of the GPA with the tabling of the first National Programme of Action country report. The Minister also led the ministerial segment of the meeting with Mr. Toepfer.

“Canada is a very strong supporter of the GPA, and has been very pleased to host this first Intergovernmental Review Meeting that brought so many nations together from around the world,” Minister Dhaliwal said. “This week, I strongly promoted an action and state-of-the-oceans report to measure our progress. Canada's oceans strategy will provide for such reporting and I encourage other countries to consider the benefits of contributing to a global oceans report.”

The Declaration will feed into important upcoming events including the Conference on Oceans and Coasts in Paris, France and the International Freshwater Conference in Bonn, Germany next week, as well as the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa in September 2002 and the Third World Water Forum in Japan in 2003.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Robert Bisset
UNEP Press Officer
Tel: +33-1-4437-7613
Fax: +33-1-4437-1474
Mobile: +33-6-2272-5842
E-mail: robert.bisset@unep.fr

Heather Bala
Director of Communications
Office of the Minister
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Ottawa
(613) 996-0076

Michel Cl  roux
Media Relations
Environment Canada
Hull
(819) 953-4016

Shannon Sheil
Local GPA/IGR Media Co-ordinator
Government of Canada Host Departments
Montr  al: (514) 396-4711, (514) 214-8749
Ottawa: (613) 276-3227

Internet : www.gpa.unep.org/igr