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PRESS RELEASE

Capacity-building workshop for North Africa and the Middle East on mainstreaming the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity (TEEB) into national planning and decision-making

Montreal, 17 February 2012 – Understanding the economic value of nature and integrating this into planning is the subject of a region-wide workshop that begins in Beirut on 21 February 2012.

Experts involved in the study on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) will work with officials responsible for national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) to increase capacity in the use of valuation studies on the economic benefits of biodiversity in the decision-making process.

Launched in 2007 by the G8+5 ministers of environment under their the Potsdam Initiative, and coordinated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), TEEB has drawn attention to the global economic benefits provided by nature, highlighting the growing costs of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation and clarifying the link between nature, the ecosystem services it provides, and the role these services play in our economies.

Governments in North Africa and the Middle East are aware of the problem of biodiversity loss and ecosystem services and acknowledge TEEB's contribution in providing guidance for balancing economic and environmental concerns.

In November 2010, the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment (CAMRE), under the League of Arab States (LAS), recognized the need for valuation studies on the economic benefits of biodiversity and ecosystem services and their links to decision-making processes, and requested funding from international organizations to hold a training workshop for this purpose. The regional conference "The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity: recognizing and capturing the value of forest ecosystem services in the MENA region", held in Tunis in June 2011, highlighted first valuation initiatives and innovative finance mechanisms with potential in the region. Many countries, including those in North Africa and the Middle East, already use national biodiversity strategies and action plans under the Convention on Biological Diversity as a central framework for coordinating policy responses to biodiversity loss across sectors and policy areas.

A 2010 gap analysis by the Institute for Advanced Studies of the United Nations University revealed, however, that existing national biodiversity strategies and action plans do not adequately address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss. In particular, the mainstreaming of ecosystems services and biodiversity into economic planning and sectors, as provided for under the new Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 adopted under the Convention, remains a considerable challenge.

The TEEB Workshop for North Africa and the Middle East is the first region-wide capacity-building response to this challenge. It is expected to trigger regional efforts from various partners, elevate more studies in economic valuation of ecosystems and their services by experts from the region and bring it up to speed with global advanced efforts, including through more funding and integration of TEEB outcomes into decision making and national biodiversity strategies and action plans.

The workshop is co-organized by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Environment Programme, through its Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA) and UNEP TEEB Office, the German Development Cooperation (GIZ), the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia

(ESCWA) and the League of Arab States, in cooperation with the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research.

The Workshop has also been made possible with funds provided by the governments of Japan, Norway and Sweden, as well as the European Union. Through this funding, the UNEP-TEEB Office is conducting a series of workshops globally. Regional organizations participating include the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Arab Center for Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), Wetland International Mediterranean Programme Office, Global Mechanism, the Lebanese National Council for Scientific Research (NCSR), national authorities on protected areas, and indigenous and local communities (ILCs).

Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, Executive Secretary to the Convention on Biological Diversity, said: “If we are truly going to mainstream biodiversity considerations into economic decision-making, we need to develop the capacity for economic valuation of ecosystem services. This workshop provides the model for this kind of training in support of sustainable development.”

Pavan Sukhdev, leader of the TEEB study, said: “TEEB provides economic analysis and policy tools to address ecosystem degradation, in order that national and local development goals can be met with the help of environmental security. TEEB also goes further than this and demonstrates, through the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity, that the value of a nation's natural capital is relevant across all government ministries, from the environment through to finance.”

The workshop takes place under the ecosystem management subprogramme of the UNEP programme of work 2010-2011, which seeks to enhance the “capacity of countries to realign their environmental programmes and financing to address degradation of selected priority ecosystem services” and to integrate ecosystems into financial sectors operations.

Where: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA), UN-House Beirut, Lebanon. Tel: +961-1-981301

When: 21-23 February 2012

Website: www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=WSCBTEEB-MENA-01 and for information on the venue www.escwa.un.org/index.asp. The TEEB website for access to TEEB reports in six languages is www.teebweb.org/. The workshop will be held in English and Arabic, with simultaneous interpretation.

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Notes for editors

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 193 Parties, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety is a subsidiary agreement to the Convention. It seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 162 countries plus the European Union have ratified the Cartagena Protocol. The Secretariat of the Convention and its Cartagena Protocol is located in Montreal. For more information visit: www.cbd.int.

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