Thirteenth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the
Convention on Cooperation for the Protection,
Management and Development of the Marine Environment and
Coastal Areas of the Atlantic Coast of the
West, Central and Southern African Region
(Abidjan Convention)

Virtual Meeting, 13th to 15th December 2021

REPORT OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE COP12 BUREAU
Introduction

The third meeting of the Bureau of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for Cooperation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of West, Central and Southern Africa (Abidjan Convention) was held on Monday, October 18th, 2021, virtually due to the COVID19 pandemic.

This meeting, organized by the Secretariat of the Abidjan Convention, had the following objectives:

1. Review of i) 2020 financial statement, ii) 2021-2022 projected budget and iii) member countries arrears contributions;
2. Proposal of a new date and venue for COP13;
3. Adoption of the report of the third meeting of the Bureau.

The meeting was twofold: an Experts’ and a Ministerial segment.

In accordance with the agenda of the meeting, Côte d’Ivoire, the host country of the third meeting of the Bureau, made the opening speech.

The Experts’ segment was attended by five (5) out of the six (6) Members of the Board (see Annexed List of Participants), namely:

1) Côte d’Ivoire, in its capacity as Chair of the Bureau;
2) Ghana as Vice Chair;
3) Sierra Leone (Vice Chair)
4) The Republic of Congo (Rapporteur);
5) The Democratic Republic of Congo (Rapporteur).

Namibia informed the Secretariat that it regrets not being able to take part in the said meeting.

With a quorum obtained, the meeting was able to proceed as per the provisions of the Rules of Procedure for Meetings and Conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention. Speeches delivered at the official opening ceremony, the introductory and informative presentations followed by discussions are attached to this report. These led to the recommendations below.

Recommendations of the Bureau meeting

Financial aspects

1. To urgently secure the settlement of all outstanding debts by the Member States through the establishment of a schedule at a taxable rate and at the discretion of each individual country, according to procedure 4, ABC-WACAF/COP12/. Inf.3;

2. To establishment an Ad hoc Committee in charge of collections, under the leadership of Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Sierra Leone, in synergy with the Convention Secretariat;

3. To back up and reaffirm its full support to the Secretariat of the Abidjan Convention in its pursuit of the financial self-sufficiency through the activation and replenishment of the extra-budgetary line. To this end, projects being run by the Secretariat should be used to feed this extra-budgetary line;
4. To approve the optional budgets for in-person, hybrid or online formats of COP13 hosting;

5. To take note of the initiatives undertaken by Ghana and the Democratic Republic of Congo to settle their arrears as soon as possible;

6. To take note that the Republic of Congo will make a statement at the Ministerial segment on its status of arrears.

Regarding CoP13

1. Confirms the COP13 theme: Ocean governance for sustainable development of the Abidjan Convention countries;

2. Opt for the date of December 13th to 17th, 2021 for the organization of COP13;

3. Takes note of the proposal of the Republic of Congo to release an official paper on this subject during the segment of Ministers;

4. Recalls the rotating nature of the COP organization among the three regions (west, central and south Africa) of the Abidjan Convention

5. Invites States Parties to the Abidjan Convention to apply for hosting COP13 organization;

6. In case of non-application of the members of the Bureau, COP13 will be held in Abidjan, depository of the ratification instruments of the said Convention.

Any other Business

The meeting considered the item on the adoption of a legally binding international treaty against pollution and recommends that:

1. The Abidjan Convention supports the adoption of such a global legally binding treaty against plastic pollution;

2. The Abidjan Convention shall submit to the next United Nations Environment Assembly a regional initiative against plastic pollution.
ANNEXES

Part One: The Expert Segment

I. Opening ceremony and organizational aspects

In accordance with the agenda of the meeting, especially the session related to the opening ceremony, Côte d’Ivoire -the host country of the second meeting of the Bureau- took the floor to make an opening speech. The Experts’ segment registered the participation of five (5) of the six (6) Members countries of the Bureau (see Annexed List of participants), namely:

1) Côte d’Ivoire, in its capacity as Chair of the Bureau;
2) Ghana as Vice Chair;
3) Sierra Leone (Vice Chair)
4) The Republic of Congo (Rapporteur);
5) The Democratic Republic of Congo (Rapporteur).

Namibia informed the Secretariat of its regrets for not being able to attend the meeting. As a quorum was reached, the meeting was able to proceed in accordance with the provisions relating to the Rules of Procedure for Meetings and Conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention referenced as UN Environment ABC-WACAF/Bureau meeting 3 COP12 /Ref.3 in the list of background documents.

This was followed by several technical presentations and discussions that featured the third meeting of the Experts segment of the Bureau of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention.

II. Activity report from July 2019 to October 2021

2.1. Progress in implementing COP12 decisions

The Secretariat made a summary of the progress made in the implementation of the decisions of COP12 with special emphasis on the period after the second COP12 Bureau meeting. In the review presented by the Executive Secretary of the Abidjan Convention, it was noted with satisfaction that almost all the recommendations have been implemented. A copy of the report has been shared with participants under the reference UN Environment ABC-WACAF/Bureau meeting 2 COP12/3.

2.2. Status of implementation of projects and programs

The Secretariat presented the progress made in the implementation of projects and programs that cover various themes such as mangroves restoration, marine protected areas creation, plastic waste and marine debris management, marine spatial planning through the information gathered from the processes of describing Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) and the preparation of the State of the Marine Environment Report (SoME), signature of Additional Protocols and development of action plans for their implementation, integrated ocean management policy in the Abidjan Convention area, as well as developments noted in the establishment of the resource center.

The Chair of the Convention’s Committee on Science and Technology presented the draft decisions to be submitted to COP13.
2.3.  **Financial Report**

As a reminder, the 12\textsuperscript{th} Conference of the Parties marked the end of the revitalization process of the Abidjan Convention initiated in 2007 and launched the active phase that helped strengthen the pivotal role of the Abidjan Convention at the regional level in debates on seas and oceans. Unfortunately, these efforts are being undermined by the recurrence of unpaid contributions, which have reached a critical threshold of \$\text{US\textsuperscript{3},343,937}, dangerously impacting the existence and full functioning of the Abidjan Convention Secretariat. See working paper *UN Environment ABC- WACAF/Bureau meeting 2 COP12/4*.

The Convention Secretariat also presented 3 optional budgets developed with pledged contributions from partners:

1. Virtual: \$\text{US\textsuperscript{58,000.00}} WACA: \$\text{50,000}; SIDA 34,000.00;
2. Hybrid: \$\text{US 170,000.00} WACA: \$\text{50,000}; Grid Arendal: \$\text{100,000,00}; SIDA 34,000.00; MEA: \$\text{45,000,00}; Host Country: \$\text{100,000,00}
3. In-person: \$\text{US 300,000.00}. Discussions are already underway with financial partners: WACA: \$\text{50,000}; Grid Arendal: \$\text{100,000.00}; SIDA \$\text{34,000.00}; MEA: \$\text{45,000.00}; Host Country: \$\text{100,000.00}

It behooves the Ministerial segment to decide which option to go for. Bearing in mind that the year 2021 marks the 40\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of ABC, the in-person option is preferred if COVID19 situation permits.

2.4.  **MOU with the host country**

A MOU was signed with the host country. This MOU turned out to be obsolete do to postponement. It is a matter of updating and relaunching this MOU with the country which will be selected for the organization. This country will be required, in addition to being up to date with its contributions, to pay its special contribution of \$\text{US 100 000,00}.

2.5.  **Other issues**

MEA: Global initiative on plastic waste management in which Ghana, WWF, GIZ are very involved. The aim is to ensure a strong and remarkable involvement of the Convention countries at the February 2022 United Nations Assembly - UNEA. The purpose is for the Abidjan Convention countries to support a legally binding global treaty.

Côte d’Ivoire welcomes this initiative which will complement those it had already taken.

2.6.  **Discussions**

Mr. GAENTSA Romaric Maclave informed that countries are taking different initiatives to attend the forthcoming UNEA meeting. The Republic of Congo is willing to support such an initiative.
Sierra Leone informs the meeting that it has already made legal provisions on plastic waste management. Sierra Leone therefore supports the submission of a binding initiative by the Abidjan Convention.

The Secretariat noted the support of the Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone and invites both countries to showcase their experience in managing plastic and marine litter at the UNEA meeting in February 2022.

III. Submission and adoption of the report of the experts’ segment

The recommendations of the experts’ segment, which are encapsulated in the first part of the report, were presented by Mr. Richard Dacosta. After some contributions from the members of the expert segment, the report was endorsed.

IV. Closing of the session

All the items on the agenda of the third meeting of the Experts segment of the Bureau of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention were discussed and various solutions were also tabled. The meeting ended with a vote of thanks from all Bureau members present. The Focal Point of Côte d’Ivoire, Mrs. BEKOIN Margueritte KOUADIO who chaired the experts’ session, closed the meeting.
PART II: MINISTERS’ SEGMENT

V. Opening ceremony, organizational aspects and speeches

In accordance with the agenda of the meeting regarding the opening ceremony, Côte d’Ivoire - the host country and Chair of the third Bureau meeting - took the floor first to welcome all participants. Then speeches were delivered to officially open the deliberations of the Bureau meeting.

1) Speeches

The Director of UNEP’s Ecosystem Integration Branch, Ms. Kerstin STENDAHL and Mr. Jean-Luc ASSI, Côte d’Ivoire Environment and Sustainable Development Minister pronounced the opening meetings.

Below is a summary of the two speeches.

● Summary of the speech by Ms. Kerstin STENDAHL Director of the UNEP Ecosystem Integration Branch

Ms. Kerstin STENDAHL welcomed the participants and expressed her pleasure at taking part in the second meeting of the Bureau.

She congratulated the Secretariat and the Bureau for efforts made in the revitalization of the Abidjan Convention and the fundraising efforts initiated to support the activities of the Secretariat. However, the Director of the Branch conveyed to the members of the Bureau her deep concern about the very high amount of unpaid contributions of the Contracting Parties to the Convention, which amount to about 3,277,882 US Dollars despite various reminders and recovery missions. According to the Director, this deplorable situation, which cannot continue anymore, dangerously affects the functioning of the Abidjan Convention Secretariat and is not likely to reassure the financial partners community.

The Director appealed Contracting Parties duty to replenish the Trust Fund to ensure the survival of the Abidjan Convention.

● Speech Summary for Mr. Jean-Luc ASSI, Côte d’Ivoire’s Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development

After welcoming the Bureau members, Mr. Jean-Luc ASSI, Côte d’Ivoire Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, recalled that the second meeting of the Bureau in June 2020 had looked into the 2020-2021 work program, the transitional budget of the Secretariat, that of COP13 as well as the holding of COP13 which had been postponed due to the Covid 19 pandemic. It had been noted that the financial situation was seriously compromising the Secretariat’s duties. Strong recommendations had been made to ensure that States fulfilled their obligations to the Convention, particularly through the payment of contributions and arrears. However, although progress has been made since then, the financial position remains in such a state that the very viability of the Convention is at stake. One of the most epitomizing consequences of this situation is the impossibility for the Convention to arrange for its 13th Conference of the Parties. »When this body fails to convene, there is no significant progress and no concrete results to appraise the work done.« The Minister deplored this situation which denies the Secretariat from a great opportunity to make known the significant progress made in the implementation of its work program and COP decisions. It is also a missed opportunity to assess the gaps to be filled and to strengthen relations with the partners of the Abidjan Convention. The health crisis is not enough to justify the postponement
of COP13 when we know that many other international events have been held in compliance with the barriers. «We must now go to the main thing: the organization of the COP13 of the Abidjan Convention. This must be the priority.» The Minister urged «to show responsibility in the respect of our commitments» so that this mandate will not be «one that will have nearly compromised the operation of the Abidjan Convention». And although the texts provide for penalties in case of failure to meet one’s obligations, the Minister hoped that this Bureau would not be faced with the exclusion of one of its members for failure to pay out its contributions as provided in the legal instruments.

The Minister congratulated the Secretariat for the development of marine and coastal areas of the Atlantic coast of Africa and the audience attracted by this Convention at the international and regional levels, thanks to the work done.

2) Organizational matters and adoption of the agenda

The COP12 Bureau was renewed without any change and is composed as follows:

1) Côte d'Ivoire, Chair of the Board;  
2) Ghana, Vice Chair;  
3) Sierra Leone, Vice Chair;  
4) Republic of Congo, Rapporteur;  
5) Democratic Republic of Congo, Rapporteur.  
6) Namibia informed the Secretariat that it regrets not being able to participate in the meeting.

It was agreed that the Rules of Procedure for Meetings and Conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention (published as UN Environment ABC-WACAF/Bureau meeting 3 COP12 /Ref.3) would govern the conduct of business at the meeting.

The provisional agenda, as contained in document UN Environment ABC-WACAF/Bureau meeting 3 COP12/1, was adopted.

This was followed by several technical papers and discussions that featured the third meeting of the Bureau of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention.

The Secretariat of the Abidjan Convention insisted on the case of the Republic of Congo, which has the obligation, as the host country of COP13, to settle its debts in full. In addition, the Secretariat indicated that from COP13, a State that is not up to date with its contributions will no longer be able to sit on the Bureau.

3) Adoption of the report of the Experts meeting

The segment of the Ministers of the third meeting of the Bureau of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention unanimously adopted the report of the meeting of experts and all the recommendations made by the experts.

4) Preparation of the next COP13

The Executive Secretary of the Abidjan Convention made a presentation on preparations for COP13, the missions performed in the Republic of Congo as well as the documents sent, in particular the framework cooperative arrangement and the COP13 budget. He also recalled the
difficulties encountered in the organization of this COP. He agreed with the Chair of the Bureau on the need to focus on the basic essentials and to prioritize the holding of COP13, including the question of maintaining the date and venue of such an event.

a. COP13 budget

The Secretariat, through its financial officer, detailed the COP13 budget. It amounts to US Dollars 235,500 and should cover the following expenses: air tickets and living expenses of the traveling delegations, rental of conference rooms, fees for the team of rapporteurs and interpreters as well as media coverage.

The Secretariat of the Convention invited the Contracting Parties to step up their efforts in the payment of contributions and arrears so as to encourage financial partners to support the Convention.

5) Next Bureau Meeting

A MOU has been signed with the host country. This MOU has now become obsolete. It is a matter of updating and reactivating this MOU with the country which will be selected for the organization. This country will be required, in addition to being up to date with its contributions, to pay its special contribution of an additional USD 100 000,00.

The Bureau opted for the date of 13 to 17 December 2021 as the date for the organization of COP13.

6) Update on other issues

The meeting considered the position to be taken in relation to the discussions for an international legally binding treaty against plastic pollution. The Bureau supports the adoption of such a treaty and invites the Parties to organize themselves in order to carry their weight in the discussions at the second session of the 5th United Nations Environment Assembly to be held in February 2022 in Nairobi under the theme Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

7) Closing Ceremony

The Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire, Mr. Jean-Luc ASSI, made a closing statement after noting that all the items on the agenda of the third meeting of the Bureau of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention were fully discussed and various solutions were also proffered. The meeting ended with a vote of thanks from all the Bureau members present.

Dated October 18, 2021

The meeting of the Ministers of the Bureau of the twelfth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Abidjan Convention.