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Major Environmental Recovery Programme Marks New Year in Haiti

Clean Energy, Tourism and Sustainable Agriculture Among Opportunities Under New Côte Sud Initiative

Port-au-Prince/Nairobi 5 January 2011 – An ambitious environmental recovery and sustainable development initiative for southwest Haiti was launched yesterday in Port-Salut by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and a consortium of partners including the Government of Haiti, the Government of Norway, Catholic Relief services, the Earth Institute at Columbia University and a host of local non-governmental organizations.

The Côte Sud Initiative (CSI), which will be implemented over a period of 20 years, aims at the recovery and sustainable development of a severely degraded land area of 780 km² -- about half the size of Greater London – and a marine area of approximately 500 km².

Ten communes, with an estimated population of 205,000 people, will benefit directly from the programme, which will include reforestation, erosion control, fisheries management, mangrove rehabilitation and small business and tourism development, as well as improved access to water and sanitation, health and education.

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "Restoring the region's environmental services will be a key step towards restoring a real and long-lasting development path for its people and a stepping stone towards a Green Economy".

"From the Mau forest complex in Kenya to Lake Faguibine in Mali and now in Haiti, UNEP and our partners are determined to demonstrate that large-scale ecosystem restoration is a cost-effective catalyst for overcoming poverty and reducing vulnerability to shocks and natural disasters," he added.

The launch of the initiative, which was made possible by an initial US\$14 million in grants provided by the Government of Norway, Catholic Relief Services and the Green Family Foundation, represents an important milestone for UNEP, which designed and developed this approach with the Government and partners starting early 2009.

Mr. Erik Solheim, Norway's Minister for Environment and International Development, took part in a launch event in Port-Salut, as part of a three-day tour of the country.

"The destiny and the development of Haiti are within the hands of the Government and the people of Haiti, and the role of Norway and its international partners is simply to support them" he said.

“It is clear that any development in the country needs to be underpinned by the sustainable management of its natural resources. For the south of Haiti we see particular opportunities in tourism, clean energy and sustainable agriculture and are very pleased to support investments in these areas,” he added.

Already prior to the devastating earthquake of January 2010, Haiti was known as the poorest, least stable and most environmentally degraded country in the Western Hemisphere.

Severe poverty, food insecurity and disaster vulnerability – which are strongly interlinked with environmental issues such as deforestation, soil erosion and land and marine degradation – have had profound impacts on the population’s well-being for decades.

The Côte Sud Initiative proposes a new approach to addressing these challenges, with a strong focus on aid coordination, national ownership and capacity-building of the Government and local partners to concurrently address the underlying drivers of poverty, environmental degradation, disaster vulnerability and the lack of access to social services.

The broad-ranging initiative, with a total expected budget of US\$ 200 million over 20 years, will involve between 50 and 100 projects, including at least 10 that are expected to last up to five years or more.

In 2011, the focus will be on establishing sound baseline data about the state of local landscapes and seascapes, and on working with local communities and partners to develop and implement practical action.

A CSI Office and Visitor Centre will shortly be set up in Port-Salut.

“The objective of this major, long-term initiative is to demonstrate that sustainable rural development is truly possible – given the right approach,” said UNEP’s Andrew Morton, the CSI Coordinator. “When the time is right, the lessons learned can be extended to the rest of Haiti” he added.

In addition to the coordination of CSI, UNEP manages a resident programme of support to the Government of Haiti from its office in Port-au-Prince, focused on post-earthquake relief and reconstruction, and projects on biogas, the marine and coastal environment, clean energy and transboundary environmental management.

Notes to Editors

Details of the new initiative and UNEP’s work in this field can be found at the following web sites www.haitiregeneration.org and www.unep.org/conflictsanddisasters/

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