

## Welcome speech for the Coral Disease Workshop

Mr / Mrs (ordre protocolaire)

Coral reefs are some of the most diverse and valuable ecosystems on Earth. Coral reefs support more species per unit area than any other marine environment, including about 4,000 species of fish, 800 species of hard corals and hundreds of other species. Scientists estimate that there may be another 1 to 8 million undiscovered species of organisms, micro-organisms mostly, living in and around reefs. This biodiversity is considered key to finding new medicines for the 21st century. Many drugs are now being developed from coral reef animals and plants as possible cures for cancer, arthritis, human bacterial infections, viruses, and other diseases.

Storehouses of immense biological wealth, reefs also provide economic and environmental services to millions of people. Coral reefs may provide goods and services worth \$375 billion each year. This is an amazing figure for an environment that covers less than 1 percent of the Earth's surface.

Healthy reefs contribute to local economies through tourism, an important sector for the Indian Ocean island-states. Diving tours, fishing trips, hotels, restaurants, and other businesses based near reef systems provide millions of jobs and contribute billions of dollars all over the world

In developing countries, coral reefs contribute about one-quarter of the total fish catch, providing critical food resources for tens of millions of people.

However Coral reefs face numerous threats. Some are natural threats such as cyclones or other natural occurrences such as the recurring El Niño. Climate changes tend to exacerbate the impact of these natural events.

Human-caused, or anthropogenic activities are major threats to coral reefs. Pollution, overfishing, destructive fishing practices using dynamite or cyanide, collecting live corals for the aquarium market and mining coral for building materials are some of the many ways that people damage reefs all around the world every day.

The vulnerability of coral ecosystems is further exacerbated by the infestation of crown of thorns and proliferation of the pathogens which bring us to the subject of this workshop which bring together stakeholders

from many organisations, public and NGO, involved in reef preservation in Mauritius..

The IOC has been supportive to reef monitoring and conservation initiatives for close to 20 years. Indeed, it was in 1997 – **International Year of Coral Reefs** – that the regional coral reef monitoring network was established and that the first monitoring manual was published by the PRE-COI, a pioneer regional project funded by the EU.

---

---

It's a source of great satisfaction and pride for the IOC to see that 20 years later the national and regional networks are still alive and active. A regional Coral Reef Status Report is prepared jointly by the network members who met in Zanzibar last week. Collaboration with the Coral Reef Task force of the Nairobi Convention and partners in Eastern Africa is being strengthened.

It is very encouraging to see the involvement of academic institutions such as the University of Mauritius in providing scientific backup to the national reef network and ICZM committees.

The participation of academic and research institutions in the reef network has been encouraged from the very beginning – actually the network started as a collaborative effort between marine sciences institutions in the IOC countries.

I wish to thank the University of Mauritius for hosting this workshop, the members of the ICZM committee for proposing it and the Biodiversity programme for making it possible. And the EU for supporting regional initiatives relating to sustainable natural resources management for over 20 years.

*Je vous souhaite un excellent travail dans le cadre de cet atelier et j'encourage a continuer les échanges avec les partenaires dans les autres pays de la region car c'est ce qui fait la force du reseau.*