

**“Establishing Monitoring and Sustainable Development  
of the Lebanese Sea: CANA-CNRS Project”**

**First Steering Committee (SC) Meeting  
Press Release**



*A picture of the members of the SC showing H.E. Ambassador, Gabriele Checchia, in the centre with Dr. George Tohmé and Dr. Mouin Hamzé on either sides, along with members of the Italian-Lebanese Committee.*

The first Steering Committee (SC) of the Project “Establishing Monitoring and Sustainable Development of the Lebanese Sea,” financed by the Italian Government in the framework of the Italian Country Budget Support Action, has been organized on the premises of the National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS) in Beirut, Lebanon; on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

**Background:**

In the wake of the devastating war in the summer of 2006, and in light of the deepening marine crisis caused by the bombing of the Jiyeh power plant and the subsequent oil spill; and within the existing cooperation of the CNRS with Italian and international organizations; the Italian Government provided a valuable donation in the form of a scientific vessel. Concurrently, the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (IAM, Bari), in collaboration with Lebanese and Italian marine researchers, committed itself to its transformation into a scientific vessel, particularly specialized in marine and environmental research, as well as geophysical campaigns in Lebanon.

In parallel to the above initiative, the CNRS in collaboration with the General Directorate of Cooperation for Development (DGCS) - Italian Embassy in Lebanon, the CIHEAM-Bari Institute and the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR), developed a project proposal entitled: "*Environmental Monitoring and Sustainable Development of the Lebanese Sea.*" On the 2nd of April, 2009, a cooperative agreement was signed between the CNRS and the Italian Government securing a 2.3 million Euro financial support to the research to be undertaken by the CANA-CNRS scientific vessel in addition to the CNRS in-kind contribution amounting to 335000 Euro.

**Attendees:**

The first SC was attended by H.E. Gabriele Checchia, Italian Ambassador to Lebanon accompanied by an Italian delegation of experts and representatives from DGCS and the Development Cooperation Office (UTL); Dr. George Tohmé, CNRS President of the Board of Directors and SC Chairman; Dr. Mouin Hamzé, CNRS Secretary General and PMU Chairman and a delegation from CNRS; as well as representatives from CDR and the Directorate General of Land and Maritime Transport.

**Proceedings and Outcome:**

Prof. G. Tohmé opened the Meeting by welcoming the Italian Ambassador and all members of the SC and PMU.

H.E. the Italian Ambassador acknowledged the attendees and related institutions and stressed the involvement of the Italian government and CNRS in developing concrete cooperation activities with a strong scientific background. In this respect, Italy wishes to strengthen the institutional relationships with Lebanon in the area of environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources.

Prof. Mouin Hamzé, Secretary General of the CNRS and PMU Chairman, briefed the attendees about the overall strategy and the impact of the project on environmental, economic and social aspects of the Lebanese community and territories, emphasizing the involvement of CNRS in developing actions for marine and environmental research in Lebanon as support to the national policies for coastal marine protection and offering chances for better utilization by Lebanese private and institutional stakeholders.

Lebanese and Italian experts and consultants described briefly the state of the art in the field of marine geophysical and biological studies, and the working plan for the three-year project (2009-2012). The Project focuses its activities to draw an accurate and detailed bathymetric map along a parallel coastal strip (10-15 km wide); to develop navigational routes near the coast, particularly at the entrances of major ports in Lebanon; and to study freshwater resurgences at sea. Also, in the area of marine biology and fisheries, the project aims to identify pollution "hot spots" along the Lebanese coast to produce: a general survey of the distribution of natural marine populations; a survey of benthic marine life and habitat for a complete list of marine biodiversity; a technical survey on the fishery sector assessing the fish stock along the Lebanese coast up to a depth of 200 meters and identification of marine mammals in Lebanese waters.

With regards to the oil spill disaster caused by the aggression against Lebanon in 2006, the project will focus on the dissolution and concentration of the remaining oil spill to assess the quality of the sea water, sediments and marine life.

The Steering Committee approved and endorsed the working and the financial plan of the Inception Report with the perspective to monitor, with the other Lebanese and Italian institutions, the results that will be achieved within the planned time schedule of the project.