

**10th EAtHC-CHAto MEETING
LOMÉ, TOGO 3, 4 & 5 December 2008**

CHAIRMAN'S OPENING WORDS

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is a great honour for me, as Director of the Spanish Hydrographic Office, to have the opportunity to chair this Tenth Meeting of the Eastern Atlantic Hydrographic Commission.

Personally, it is a great pleasure for me and I think that for all of us attending this meeting to have the opportunity to visit again the country of an Associate member of our Regional Commission. Two years ago, for the first time and after amending our Statutes, our Ninth meeting was held in Dakar, Senegal. Now, going ahead with the agreed purpose of holding our meetings in those countries that can take advantage of this events in order to support the development of their national hydrographic services, we are meeting in Lomé the capital city of a country, Togo, which is deeply involved in this process of consolidating its hydrographic infrastructure.

A clear sign of this process was the signature of the Statutes of this Regional Commission, ceremony that took place the 9th of November 2007, during the technical visit accomplished by SHOM Staff to Togo and Benin. In this way, Togo became an Associate member of the Eastern Atlantic Hydrographic Commission and able to host this plenary session.

Let me therefore and first of all to thank the Government of Togo, represented here today by His Excellency the Prime Minister (the delegate of the Minister of Transportation), for accepting the invitation to host this meeting and of course I would like also to thank the Director General of the Port of Lomé and all his staff, focal point of the organization process. I know that you all have done an excellent work in the preparation of these sessions and on behalf of all the distinguished delegations who are attending this meeting, receive my congratulations and my appreciation for your effort.

The Togolese Republic, moving forward in its desire of improving their hydrographic services is going to sign during this Opening Ceremony a bilateral arrangement with France that has been prepared during this last year. Let me welcome the Ambassador of France to Togo who will sign this arrangement on behalf of the French Government. We really appreciate the big effort that France is doing subscribing this arrangements, such as the last one just signed between France and Morocco the 21st of January of this year, and a third one with Cameroon which is currently in its final

phase of negotiation. All these bilateral agreements are a clear sign of the firm determination of France to collaborate with the development of hydrographic services in this region.

I would also like to welcome all the delegations who are here today; Members, Associate Members, Observers and International Organizations and very specially let me welcome Captain Hugo Gorziglia, Director of the International Hydrographic Organization, whose advice and expertise will help us very much during the development of this meeting. I would like to inform you that I have received the apologies of Morocco and DOALOS who will not be able to attend this meeting but who had the courtesy of letting me know in advance.

During these three days we will review all the events that took place during the last two years affecting our Regional Commission and we will try to establish those objectives that will help us with the improvement of the nautical cartography and the promulgation of maritime safety information within this region for the next two years.

I am conscious that not too much progress has been achieved during this period of time. The lack of enough funding and hydrographic infrastructure in this area makes it difficult to achieve some of our goals. Actions specified in bilateral agreements and activities funded by the Capacity Building Committee of the IHO are important ways to make progress in our activities. Those countries with cartographic responsibility in the region are doing big efforts to update the hydrographic surveys and afterwards producing the corresponding nautical charts. And the CBC is also trying to collaborate by funding several regional projects.

Three different projects are on their way right now in our Commission and we will discuss about them during this meeting. Let me mention now the “Basic Practical Hydrographic Survey Course”. In this one we hope to collaborate with the Maritime Academy of Accra that will probably host this course. Let me welcome the distinguished delegation from Accra Maritime Academy who is attending this meeting. Please, be welcome to our Commission.

We will have the opportunity during these days to prepare a list with the proposals of new projects to be discussed during the next CBC meeting. We will try to include in that list those projects that, from a realistic point of view will, most probably have the chance to receive funding and be finally accomplished during the next months.

But these are not the only ways of receiving funds. There is a third way that can be accomplished by the developing nations in the region applying through their respective Governments for assistance which is available from relevant international organizations (for example European Union, United Nations Development programme and World Bank), according to IHO Circular Letter 17, 2008.

We all know that we are dealing with a difficult task. All the countries in the region know how important maritime transportation is for the developing of national economies. And they also know which is the way to go in order to make it efficient and effective. As it was agreed and expressed last year in the Declaration of Abuja, we need now to continue making national authorities in the region know that they must consider paying special attention to maritime safety and at the same time bringing forward projects for external funding.

A good way of paying attention to maritime safety is to create national offices in charge of hydrographic and maritime safety information issues. These offices should be the point of contact between national governments and international organizations such as IHO and IMO. Once that kind of national Hydrographic Committee exists, it is easier for that country to organize the future development of a national hydrographic office able to produce its own cartography. That Committee must be the focal point that concentrates the efforts made by a specific country in order to get funds, technical advice and personnel training.

Also they must not forget, according to IHO Circular Letter 72 2008, that the IHO Directing Committee is always available to approach relevant authorities, where individual national Hydrographers consider that this will help them raising the levels of awareness and commitment to provide appropriate hydrographic services in their countries.

Therefore, countries in the region should also commit themselves in the creation of these Hydrographic Committees that must be the first step in the development of a national self-dependant hydrographic authority.

Togo is a clear example of this commitment. Following the directions given by the IHO, they announced one year ago the creation of their Working Committee on Hydrography, Oceanography and Maritime Navigation Safety and this year they have established the organization and the working rules for this Committee. This is a good way to go.

I have already mentioned the bilateral agreements that will be signed this year and the other one that will be signed soon. The Capacity Building Committee, as it has already been said before, is developing also a very important task in these last years and will continue in this way in the future. Specific amounts of money for specific projects focused in hydrographic capability assessment, technical advice and professional training. This is considered to be the best way of investing the limited available funds.

Working all together is the only way in which we will be able to find a final solution to problems related to maritime safety. It is not just having nautical charts been produced by foreign countries. Our final goal must be to have countries in the region producing their own reliable charts.

And the only way to do this is using all the available means: national commitment, bilateral arrangements and CBC projects can be three good columns to stand on. Let's take good advantage of these three days in order to programme accordingly our future actions.

I wish all of us a successful meeting.

I would like to thank again the Togolese Authorities for their hospitality.

And to all of you thank you very much for your attention. And now, let me leave the floor to Captain Hugo Gorziglia, Director of the International Hydrographic Bureau.