



UNITED NATIONS FRESHWATER AGREEMENTS INITIATIVE

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For more information, please visit

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1. The United Nations Freshwater Agreements Initiative

WWF is calling on countries to take action to give effectiveness to three policy instruments that promote cooperation among basin/aquifer states and establish their rights and obligations in the use and management of internationally shared freshwater resources:

- a) **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UN Watercourses Convention):** WWF urges the world's governments to join and implement the UN Watercourses Convention, which requires 18 additional ratifications out of 35 that are necessary for entry into force.
- b) **ILC Draft Articles on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers, 2008 (2008 ILC Draft Articles):** We call upon the world's governments to consider the ILC Draft Articles and how they can be best applied to foster the cooperative management of their groundwater systems shared with neighboring nations. In so doing, states are advised to take into account both the weaknesses and strengths of the draft articles—an assessment WWF is currently developing with the aim of fostering continuous dialogue and ultimately contributing to the improvement of the text adopted by the ILC in a future binding instrument on the topic.
- c) **Amendments to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (UNECE Water Convention):** WWF asks the member states of the *United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)* and parties to the UNECE Water Convention to accept the 2003 Amendment that opens the convention for accession by non-member states. At this time, ten parties have accepted such an amendment and 34 are necessary for the Meeting of the Parties to consider requests for accession by third states.

2. What WWF, partners and other key stakeholders have been doing

The UN Watercourses Convention Global Initiative:

- **Action by partners:**

- Ahead of the 5th World Water Forum, letters signed by the **President of WWF International**, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, were sent to all **contracting states**, as well as to the **members of the European Union** and the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**. In the letters, our President invited countries to the high-level event organized in Istanbul to celebrate progress under the global initiative, and urged their governments to join, implement, and promote the entry into force of the convention, as appropriate.
- In May 2009, **Oxfam Australia, WWF Australia, Green Cross Australia**, and the **Australian Water Association** sent a joint letter to the country's Minister for Foreign Affairs, requesting him to take action to trigger the process for Australia to join the UN Watercourses Convention. The letter underscores the relevance of the convention for that country, particularly for:
 - *Enhancing security in the region, where poor management of shared waters may exacerbate conflicts and displacement of people in Asia, especially with climate change;*
 - *Enhancing security in other regions where there are disagreements over management of shared rivers, such as in Africa, where West African states are looking to the convention as a framework for collaboration;*
 - *Supporting the implementation of the Government's foreign, environmental and aid policies and investments by strengthening governance in the countries concerned;*
 - *Encouraging exports of Australian services for good river management, estimated at between \$200-400 million per year worth of products and services from roughly 100 Australian firms.*

By ratifying the convention, Australia would be fulfilling the expectations of the international community arising from its vote in favor of the convention in the United Nations General Assembly in 1997. The decision to join would have no negative domestic implications for Australia.

- **The Lake Constance Foundation for Nature and Culture (Bodensee Stiftung)** has sent letters to the governments of **Austria, Lichtenstein, Poland**, and **Switzerland**, reminding them that most of the world's transboundary river basins lack adequate legal protection, and underscoring those countries' active role in the negotiation and voting processes of the UN Watercourses Convention. The respective letters also urge those countries to join the convention, in conformity with the leadership and solidarity they have often shown in the fields of transboundary water cooperation, international law, and development assistance;

- **WWF has recently become a UN Water partner:** This gives us the opportunity to join the *UN Water Task-Force on Transboundary Waters* (<http://www.unwater.org/TFtrans.html>). And the *UN Watercourses Convention booklet* is now available under “Resources for Policy Makers:”
- Legal Issues, Conventions and Rights (<http://www.unwater.org/policylegal.html>);
- Transboundary Waters (<http://www.unwater.org/policytrans.html>). Links to WWF’s webpage on international water law, as well as to other relevant information sources on the UN Watercourses Convention, the ILC Draft Articles, and the UNECE Water Convention, are also available here.

3. New ratifications/accessions & other successes

The UN Watercourses Convention Global Initiative – *New Ratifications:* In April 2009, Tunisia became the 17th contracting state to the UN Watercourses Convention, bringing down to 18 the number of additional ratifications needed for entry into force.

4. Outcomes from Events

The UN Watercourses Convention Global Initiative – *5th World Water Forum* (Istanbul, Turkey, 16-22 March 2009): The UN Watercourses Convention was a major subject at several events and sessions, both during and in preparation for the 5th World Water Forum.

Below we summarize the Forum’s main outcomes of relevance to the global initiative. More details are available at http://assets.panda.org/downloads/un_watercourses_convention_at_v_forum.pdf

- On Sunday, Mar.15, WWF participated in the **NGO Orientation Day**, organized by the Freshwater Action Network to enable dialogue and learning among civil society organizations ahead of the Forum. WWF led the session on transboundary waters, underlining the UN Watercourses Convention and the role of civil society to promote its entry into force and future implementation. The audience included a number of FAN members and other international and national NGOs.
- **Parliamentarian rounds:** During the Forum, Ms. Ursula Eid, a member of the German Parliament and member of the UN Secretary General’s Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB), introduced the discussions on transboundary waters, urging countries to join the UN Watercourses Convention.
- **Thematic process:**
 - ***Topic 1.1 – Adapting to Climate Change, Session 1.1.3, Roundtable 7 – Climate Change and Transboundary Water Issues:*** Participants debated the role that the UN Watercourses Convention could play in fostering transboundary adaptation to climate change, and in mitigating the potential for the impacts of climate change on shared water resources to increase the risk for interstate conflict.

Participants recalled the progress achieved under the UNECE Water Convention, including the ongoing development of guidelines on the topic, as evidence of how beneficial it would be to have a comparable effective framework at the global level. Recognizing that, once in force, the UN Watercourses Convention could provide such a framework, the co-chairs wrapped-up the roundtable recommending, among other things, that countries join and implement both conventions.

- **Topic 3.1 – Basin Management and Transboundary Cooperation, Session 3.1.5 – Synthesis Session:** The Topic’s Rapporteur, Prof. Slavko Bogdanovic, underscored the many calls, during the Forum, for additional ratifications of the UN Watercourses Convention. He also reiterated a proposal from the audience for the UN Secretary-General to analyze the status and the ratification process and, as appropriate, to establish and charge an interim body with supporting and promoting the convention’s entry into force.

- **Regional process:**
 - The Palestinian Water Authority drew attention to President Abbas’ announcement that **Palestine** would join the UN Watercourses Convention upon becoming a state, and urged the application of international law as a tool to foster the equitable sharing of transboundary waters.

 - The **Mediterranean Regional Document** includes an explicit recommendation for countries to join the UN Watercourses Convention, as a useful framework for “hydro-diplomacy.”

 - The **European Regional Document** refers to the UN Watercourses Convention as a potential platform for cooperation and knowledge sharing between Europe and other regions. The paper also underscores the experience and successes achieved through the implementation of the UNECE Water Convention and the Water Framework Directive. When formulating policy recommendations on the topic, the paper refers to the wealth of knowledge produced under those two regional frameworks to highlight the potential role that the UN Watercourses Convention, once in force, could play globally, as a universal legal framework governing transboundary water cooperation.

- WWF closed its participation in the Forum with the successful high-level event “**Sign Up: sharing water for people and the planet**”, co-hosted by the European Water Partnership, the Global Nature Fund and Living Lakes Partners, Green Cross International, the Norwegian Government, and the UN Secretary General’s Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation.

Detailed information about the event, its outcomes, and next steps under the *Campaign*

“*UN Watercourses Convention: In force by 2011*” are available at

[http://www.panda.org/what we do/policy/international water law/outcomes from the 5th world water forum istanbul turkey.cfm](http://www.panda.org/what_we_do/policy/international_water_law/outcomes_from_the_5th_world_water_forum_istanbul_turkey.cfm).

The event celebrated the accomplishments of the world’s leading countries in international water policy as they contribute towards advancing the process for entry into force of the UN Watercourses Convention by 20110.

WWF Leaders for a Living Planet awards were presented to 12 of the 17 contracting states to the UN Watercourses Convention. Following the award ceremony, key government representatives from 13 additional countries signed postcards symbolizing their commitment to our call for bringing the convention into force by 2011, as well as a pledge to champion the convention within their own governments. Those countries were *Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Ghana, Greece, Niger, Sierra Leone, Spain, and Slovenia*—many of which have already started the ratification process, including Benin, France, Ghana, and Spain.

Moreover, representatives from some key international organizations signed a postcard offering their support to our call for additional ratifications and pledging to work proactively towards the “entry into force by 2011” goal. IUCN closed the event with a brief speech about their intention to support efforts in raising awareness and understanding of the convention worldwide.

- Sunday, 22 March, marked celebrations for the **2008 World Water Day**, which focused on transboundary waters. During the UN Water event, the Chair of the Palestinian Water Authority reiterated its previous calls for more countries to join the UN Watercourses Convention.

5. New/updated/revised informational materials*

The UN Watercourses Convention Global Initiative:

- **Presentations at international events:** IUCN World Conservation Congress: Water Pavilion session “*Steal for it, Shoot for it or Sign for it—the stark choices ahead for the world's shared waters*”: http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/un_convention_water_wars_iucn_congress_for_use.pdf;
- **New article** on transboundary water issues, the UN Watercourses Convention, and the global initiative to bring it into force (in Polish) (Julia Ziemińska, in "Polityka Globalna," at <http://www.politykaglobalna.pl/2009/04/konwencja-niecierpiaca-zwloki/>);

*Please e-mail Flavia.Loures@wvfus.Org, for copies of any documents or presentations not available on line.

6. Upcoming Meetings/Events

- **2009 World Water Week**
 - **Workshop 1 “Benefit Sharing and Transboundary Waters,”** co-convened by the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) and the UN-Water Task Force on Transboundary Waters;
 - **Side Event “The UN Watercourses Convention: How can European Countries Benefit from its Entry into Force and Implementation?”**, co-convened by WWF, SIWI, the Swedish Ministry of the Environment (t.b.c.), and the European Water Partnership (EWP);