

# First International Environment Forum for Basin Organizations

## Towards Sustainable Freshwater Governance

26–28 November 2014, Nairobi, Kenya

### FINAL ANNOUNCEMENT



Co-convened by  
the International Network of Basin Organizations



In Partnership with



International Association for Water Law  
*Asociación Internacional de Derecho de Aguas*  
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DU DROIT DES EAUX



## I. Background

The importance of freshwater resources to human life and development cannot be overstated. The essential roles these resources play relate to human health, facilitating trade, communication, inland navigation, agriculture, fishing, fish-farming, energy production, recreation, tourism, culture and location of human settlements.

The state of the global freshwater resources, however, is in crisis. As human populations swell and economies expand, both surface and groundwater resources are being depleted and polluted to an extent never before witnessed. Competition for the increasingly scarce resources has reached unprecedented levels. Rivers, lakes, aquifers, wetlands, and other water bodies are being strained. Both surface and groundwater resources are being depleted and polluted and wetlands and habitats destroyed. Ecosystems, species as well as communities around the globe are increasingly suffering from these impacts.

Existing governance structures provide, in most cases, policy, legal and institutional frameworks for meeting human water demands, they often insufficiently, if at all, address the control of pollutions and the protection of ecosystems in the provision of water.

Effective cooperative arrangements for the management of freshwater basins, which recognise the environmental dimension for these resources, are indispensable as new challenges, such as climate change, arise. States face the challenge of mitigating and adapting to climate variability involving adjustments in water management whilst balancing ever-growing water demands for development. Whilst this unpredictable state of affairs embeds a potential for conflict among stakeholders, it also provides an opportunity for cooperation, growth and the sharing of costs and benefits.

## II. Objective

The primary objective of the First International Environment Forum for Basin Organizations is to strengthen basin organizations as key building blocks for environmental governance. Basin Organizations are crucial in supporting the implementation of internationally agreed environmental goals and objectives embedded in many Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) as well as in national and basin-wide water management schemes.

The Forum will provide the opportunity for basin organizations from around the globe to share experiences on strengthening their governance structures as well as incentives and tools for enhancing their operations particularly for the implementation of different environmental obligations and international agreed goals in support of sustainable development.

Basin Organizations will explore avenues of building synergies and making trade-offs in development to meet global needs for water, food and energy whilst conserving the environment.

For transboundary basins in particular, the debate is expected to focus on enhancing the complementary implementation of basin level agreements and relevant global conventions, such as MEAs, in particular in light of the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses in 2014.

### III. Expected Outcomes

- The establishment of a forum for basin organizations integrating existing networks to exchange experiences to improve the environmental governance and management of freshwater resources;
- Providing permanent discussion tools between basin managers to better their knowledge and know how on environmental protection of aquatic environments;
- Enhanced legal, policy and institutional support to basin organizations to effectively implement internationally agreed environmental goals and objectives, including MEAs;
- Priority actions to protect ecosystems in freshwater basins for the continued provision of both surface and groundwater resources in the context of sustainable development;
- Increased political and institutional support to international cooperative frameworks for the sustainable management of freshwater basins; and,
- Contributions by basin organizations to international processes and fora, such as the post 2015 development agenda, United Nations Environment Assembly, the Stockholm World Water Week, the World Water Forum, INBO and others.

### IV. Technical Segment (26 and 27 November 2014)

#### Theme 1: Water Quality and Ecosystem Health

As human populations continue to swell and economies expand, the protection of healthy ecosystems to secure water resources has become a global issue. Declining water quality and destruction of aquatic ecosystems are issues of critical concern. If not properly addressed, it will continue to be a threat to the integrity of ecosystems, water security and livelihoods. Basin Organizations have a key role to play in addressing the global water quality challenge. The Forum will review existing governance arrangements and their respective enforcement mechanisms to adequately protect water quality and basin resources, especially ecosystems. Basin Organizations, as custodians of the integrity of these resources, have an important contribution to make in the formulation and implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.

#### Theme 2: Water-Energy-Food Nexus and Adaptation to Climate Change

Sustainable development requires the adoption of an ecosystem based approach to the management of freshwater basins and a stronger consideration of the sustainability dimension in the water, energy, and food nexus. Overexploitation of water resources to meet water, food and energy demands is a challenge resulting in the degradation of ecosystems. Basin Organizations will deliberate on how they can positively contribute to water, food and energy security, protection and restoration of aquatic ecosystems along with adapting to climate change impacts. The Forum will provide an opportunity to consider how Basin Organizations can contribute to the post 2015 development agenda and its realization.

#### Theme 3: Environmental Laws and Regulations

Effective and adaptive legal and institutional frameworks are crucial to address the ever increasing challenges and complexities associated with managing water resources. An increasing number of countries have taken a "greener" approach to balancing socio-economic development and environmental protection when drafting and reviewing domestic water related laws and regulations applicable to both surface and groundwater resources. Basin Organizations are key players in facilitating the implementation of such agreements in national and basin-wide water

management schemes. For transboundary basins, international water law has evolved beyond its people-focused and commerce-based origins and has expanded to address environmental conservation issues. This process is significant for Transboundary Basin Joint Organizations and further embodied in the adoption of a great number of MEAs and the elaboration of internationally accepted environmental principles, many of which bear great significance for the sustainability of freshwater resources across the globe.

#### Theme 4: Institutional Challenges

The effective and sensible governance of the world's freshwater resources requires strong and adequate policy, legal, financial and institutional mechanisms to deal with the multiple economic, social and environmental challenges. But existing governance structures are, in most cases and still too often, primarily geared towards only satisfaction of human water demand. Too often these frameworks insufficiently, if at all, address the particular capacity needs of basin organizations required for the protection and sustainable use of both surface and groundwater resources and their related ecosystem services. Basin Organizations will have the opportunity to share their experiences and discuss the way forward to meet their institutional challenges in responding to environmental pressures and promote sustainable freshwater governance within their respective basins.

#### THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT (28 November 2014)

The High-level Segment of the Forum will discuss the way forward for sustainable governance and management of freshwater basins based on the outcomes of the technical segment.

It will take resolutions on how basin organizations and the Forum can contribute to overarching policy agendas, such as the formulation of, as well as the implementation of, environmental and developmental goals. The segment will be composed of Ministers, heads of Basin Organizations and other invited high-level participants.

The outcomes of this segment are intended to influence relevant international processes and to stimulate further policy dialogue at relevant fora.

### V. The Target Audience

The Forum will bring together key stakeholders in the management of freshwater basins from all around the globe, such as ministers of water and the environment, heads of basin organizations and water directors, heads of national delegations to transboundary basin organizations, UN Agencies and other relevant international organizations, financial institutions, MEA Secretariats, civil society and academia.

### VI. Logistical Information

- The Forum will be held at the UN Office at Nairobi, Kenya, from 26 to 28 November 2014.
- The languages of the Forum will be English, French and Spanish.
- Limited financial resources are available to support the participation of developing countries and countries with economies in transition.
- To register for the Forum or for additional material please contact the UNEP secretariat: [basin.forum@unep.org](mailto:basin.forum@unep.org)

*For more information please visit: [www.unep.org/delc/forumbasinorganizations](http://www.unep.org/delc/forumbasinorganizations)*