

8th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (Astana, 10-12 October 2018)

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Honorable Ministers and distinguished guests.

It gives me great pleasure to address you on behalf of WWF. As many of you are aware the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes aims to ensure the sustainable use of transboundary water resources by facilitating cooperation but it also plays a significant role in the recognition of wetland ecosystems of importance. The Water Convention thus also plays a vital role for cooperation to ensure the stability and protection of ecosystems and the services that they provide.

UNECE Assessments and Management plans developed under the Convention also provide contracting parties with an opportunity to deliver Sustainable Development Goal 6: Ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

With water being a central element across all the SDGs, working towards the goals of the Convention also contributes to delivering multiple SDGs. I would also like to highlight that transboundary cooperation on the world's most important rivers, will be crucial in allowing us to take urgent action to combat climate change and create more resilient societies.

WWF especially appreciates the policy efforts, methodological support and pilot projects initiated by the Secretariat. Many of the interventions of the secretariat have occurred in ecologically important areas, like the Kura-Araks river basin in Caucasus, the Chu and Talas Rivers and in the Amu Darya River.

We believe the experience and approaches of the Water Convention are certainly applicable in many of the world's most important rivers and this is evident with two countries outside the pan-European region joining the convention Chad and Senegal.

I would like to draw your attention to one particular river basin very close to where we are, the transboundary Ili River basin. The water basin is shared between Kazakhstan (about 30% of water flow income) and China (about 70%). This basin is extremely biodiverse and the delta of the Ili river is a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, 284 birds species, including two globally vulnerable pelicans. The lower stream of the Ili River is also home to the tiger reintroduction program – the ambitious joint program of WWF and Kazakhstan Government to reintroduce tigers after 70 years.

The lower stream is the main tributary (provides 80% of water) of the Balkhash Lake – the 15th largest lake in the World and the only lake in the World, which half freshwater and half saline.



According to the Fifth National Report on Progress in Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan: with accelerating the development and increasing the irrigated area in Kazakhstan and China, there is a risk that by 2045 the Balkhash lake will lose 86 % of their water reserves.

The mark 341 m a.s.l. is critical. Below it the Balkhash lake will separate on two parts with catastrophic environmental consequences. The main drivers, which can lead to the dramatic level decline are: too large water withdrawal for agriculture, lack of cooperation in water management between two countries, climate change impacts (evaporation raising, larger needs for water in agriculture, depletion of glaciers in future), quality of water infrastructure (reservoirs and channels) and their management.

Traditional conservation measures on their own will not be enough to save the species that depend on the Ili River, especially with the threat of climate change. For conservation

efforts to be successful it is necessary to maintain the water level of the Balkhash Lake and this will require transboundary cooperation on water use and consumption, as well as reforestation in key watersheds. We will host a side event on the 12th October at 8:30 am to discuss the challenges and opportunities along the Ili River so please join us to find out more.

Finally, WWF would like to reiterate its commitment to continue to work with the Secretariat to strengthen and support the convention and we further call for the Water Convention to become the platform for the development of bilateral agreements and provide strong methodological support around water resources and associated land use management for the world's transboundary basins.

Thank you