



UN  
2023 WATER  
CONFERENCE

NEW YORK  
22-24  
MARCH  
2023

## UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

*“Water for Nature, Nature for Water: Integrated Policy Solutions and Commitments for Sustainable Development and the Conservation, Restoration and Management of Freshwater Biodiversity”*

Side Event HQ87

– March 23, 11:00-12:15, United Nations Headquarters, Room C

Partners: International Association for Water Law; Ajemalebu Self Help; AGWA; Brazilian Knowledge Center on Biodiversity, Brazilian Program on Biodiversity; Conservation International; Earth Law; Ecuadorian Rivers Institute; Environmental Law Institute; Free-Flowing Rivers Lab; French Water Academy; French Water Partnership; Geneva Water Hub; Global Pact Coalition; Global River Protection Coalition; GWP; Global Youth Biodiversity Network; Government of France, French Biodiversity Agency; Government of Senegal, Ministry of Water and Sanitation; Government of South Africa, Department of Water and Sanitation, Water Research Commission; Government of South Africa, Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, South African National Parks; Government of South Africa, Department of Water and Sanitation, Inkomati-Usuthu Catchment Management Agency; Hydrotechnical Society of France; Indianapolis Zoo, Global Center for Species Survival; International Network of Basin Organizations; International Office for Water; International Rivers; International Water Resources Association; IUCN; IUCN WCPA, Freshwater Specialist Group; IUCN, WCEL, Water and Wetland Specialist Group; Northern Arizona University School of Earth and Sustainability; Overseas Academy of Sciences; Ramsar Convention Secretariat; Réseau des Chercheurs Italiens en France; SHOAL; Synchronicity Earth; TNC; UNEP; UNESCO; University of Limoges (France), Observatoire des Mutations Institutionnelles et Juridiques; University of Mpumalanga (South Africa), Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, School of Biology and Environmental Sciences, Rivers of Life Research Programme; Water Convention Secretariat; Wetlands International; World Youth Parliament for Water; WWF.

**Background on the event (one paragraph):** An intergenerational multistakeholder panel discussed international, national, and local customary law, and associated Water Action Agenda commitments, to mainstream the protection of rivers, riparian corridors, and other water-related ecosystems in decision-making by governments, businesses, and civil society, at various levels and across sectors. The central question was how to improve the governance of freshwater biodiversity for the benefit of nature, societies, and economies towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. Presentations and audience interventions assessed the role and adequacy of, and complementarity between, global conventions, transboundary cooperation agreements, national statutes, and local customary law; built on the *Wuhan Declaration on Wetlands*, the *Sharm El-Sheik Implementation Plan*, and the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity*

*Framework*; and proposed solutions to integrate SDGs 6, 13 and 15. Outcomes are expected to feed into the SDG Summit, IWRA's XVIII World Water Congress, the 10<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum, the Summit for the Future, and beyond.

**Water Action Agenda:** [\*Dakar Action Plan\*](#) for the basins of lakes, rivers and aquifers: Morocco, Senegal, Switzerland; UNECE; OMVS; OMVG. [\*Freshwater Challenge\*](#): IUCN; Wetlands International; UNEP; Ramsar Convention; TNC; AB In-Bev. *Joint commitment on the 3-year action plan for the implementation of the Water and Nature Declaration*: TNC; WWC; OiEau; INBO. [\*Manifesto\*](#) for National Integrated Legal Frameworks for Water Resources Governance: AIDA; ELI; IUCN WCEL. *Southern African Transboundary Sustainable Biodiversity and Water Resources Management Programme in the Incomati Basin 2023-2025* (not yet submitted): University of Mpumalanga; Government of South Africa: South African National Parks and Inkomati-Usuthu Catchment Management Agency.

**Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points):** 1. Richness, vulnerability and decline of freshwater biodiversity, with grave environmental, social, and economic consequences, despite decades of efforts to strengthen its governance and management. 2. Fragmentation of international and domestic environmental/water governance. 3. Strengthening of laws, institutions, finance, data, and science for freshwater biodiversity protection; 4. Identification of priority areas and ecosystem protection and restoration, within the framework of IRBM; 5. Centrality of the contributions of indigenous and local communities. 6. Global water conventions and transboundary legal-institutional regimes for the protection of shared rivers, lakes, and aquifers, and associated ecosystems. 7. Water/land tenure, ecocide, and rights of nature/rivers /lakes/wetlands. 8. Corporate water stewardship and biodiversity reporting frameworks.

**Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points):** 1. Prioritize and better employ, tailor, and strengthen laws, conventions, and planning instruments for the durable/permanent protection of free-flowing rivers and their catchments, connected aquifers and lakes, including in the context of a dedicated global initiative and policy framework. 2. Integrate aquatic ecosystems into systems of protected areas and OECMs (designated protected lakes and wild/heritage rivers; conserved key biodiversity areas; sacred sites and IPLCs territories; no-go zones; source water and aquifer recharge protection; protected floodplain/riparian/migratory corridors; fisheries/recreational/ecotourism reserves; Ramsar wetlands, world heritage sites, biosphere reserves; protected international watercourses/lakes). 3. Respect and harness local knowledge, laws, and institutions, acknowledging their legitimacy and authority in national legal regimes. 4. Develop and apply Earth Law as an ecocentric and holistic tool, recognizing the intrinsic value and rights of nature, to create momentum and inspiration, boost political will for change, and accelerate a paradigm shift in water governance. 5. Promote multilevel and coherent governance, securing top-down big policy shifts, including to better target finance, while integrating policy efforts with field work and community-led conservation, all supported by scaled-up capacity development, data collection, financing, and innovations, and the application of national and local data and science in the service of the countries and communities from which such knowledge originated. 6. Incorporate ecocide in domestic and international criminal law.