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Report of the UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

“From UNEA to General Assembly:

Taking action for Sustainable Lake Management - as a catalyst to accelerate global commitment in the Water Action Agenda“



The event was held at the margins of UN 2023 Water Conference, co-organized by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), on March 22, 2023, at the UN Headquarters, New York.

Background

Natural and artificial lakes cover more than 90 per cent of the freshwater on the surface of the Earth, and are major contributors of freshwater for human and environmental needs, for as well as for food, energy and industrial needs for livelihoods and for the advancement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. On the other hand, the state of lake environments, notably in terms of water quality and quantity, is severely deteriorating around the world, threatening human health, biodiversity and the environment. This has to be urgently addressed in a sustainable manner, through the Sustainable Lake Management.

The UNEA-5.2 Resolution No. 5/4 on Sustainable Lake Management, which was adopted in Nairobi, in March 2022 requests all States Members of the United Nations and relevant international organizations, to:

- a. protect, conserve, restore and ensure the sustainable use of lakes;
- b. integrate lakes into national and regional development plans;
- c. take into account their local culture and knowledge, and to engage and build capacity of local communities;
- d. involve all stakeholders;
- e. take into account research and scientific guidance; and
- f. develop international networking and collaboration;

The resolution also specifically requests the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to support the implementation of the Resolution by:

- a. supporting the advancement of sustainable lake management at all levels,
- b. facilitating collaboration between States Members of the United Nations or members of specialized agencies in research, capacity-building and the sharing of knowledge, information and best practices, as well as
- c. advancing mainstreaming of sustainable lake management and raising awareness of sustainable lake management at the global level.

This event had highlighted the importance of protection, conservation, restoration and sustainable use of lakes and other freshwater ecosystems, in an integrated management basin-wide approach, addressing several condition: water pollution, degraded land, poverty, and others, and further highlighting the diverse value stemming from those efforts into several ecosystem services: food, health, energy, biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk reduction, livelihood, and economic and social co-benefits. The event was aimed to share knowledge, experiences and best practices and garner commitment towards sustainable lake management to advance the Water Action Agenda.


Keynote Speeches



Prof. Dr. Siti Nurbaya Bakar, Indonesia's Minister of Environment and Forestry, keynote speech delivered by Sigit Reliantoro, Director General of Environmental Pollution and Degradation Control, highlighted that the event provided an opportunity to share thoughts, in highlighting the pivotal role of environment, especially water-related ecosystems. Special thanks to the UNEP, for the encouragement to Indonesia to put environment protection at the heart of the country's economic recovery and sustainable development. As reflected on Indonesia's continues efforts in implementing UNEA 5.2 Resolution on Sustainable Lake Management, for Indonesia, those efforts demonstrate that sustainable lake management has indeed become an integral and strategic component in balancing environmental protection and economic development. All policies, programs, activities and actions carried out will be a manifestation of responsibility at national level in managing lake sustainably, as a catalyst to accelerate global commitment in the Water Action Agenda. Indonesia encourages all member states and relevant international organizations to support, to make impactful contributions, to ensure the sustainable lake management, to render full support to the advancing of this cause.



Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), through video message, expressed thanks to the Government of Indonesia for leadership in driving the Sustainable Lake Management Resolution at the 5th Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi last year. The resolution is crucial to help tackle the threat facing lakes and wetlands. As a result of the triple planetary crisis, the crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste, freshwater ecosystems have lost significant extent and biodiversity. Protecting lake ecosystems is also essential to tackling the triple crisis, and the three key areas need to really push for action.



First, in committing to the resolution on sustainable lake management we need to look to Member States to put more of their lakes under protection. In a similar vein to the Ramsar sites. This would help us ensure that Member States stand by their commitments to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and the global biodiversity framework that we just gaveled in Montreal last year.

Second, we need to increase transboundary cooperation to protect and to sustainably manage and restore lakes, wetlands, and inland freshwater ecosystems. International cooperation on transboundary rivers such as on the Rhine and the Mekong River Basin show that this can be done. And we can do the same for major lakes. In this context, I'm pleased to see commitments to Africa's Great Lakes. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the Lake Portal offer a know-how on sustainable management and meaningful action that can help grow transboundary collaboration.

And third, we need to increase investments in nature-based solutions. We've seen that investments in nature-based solutions work, for example, by using lakes to cool cities, as is happening in Toronto. But investments are also needed to reinforce water resource management rules and regulations. Sustainable management of lakes is essential to the Water Action Agenda and to ending the triple planetary crisis. We must all commit to redouble our efforts to ensure the health and the extent of these key ecosystems.

Presentation of the Speakers

Presentation of the speakers co-facilitated by Dr. Joakim Harlin, Head of Freshwater Unit, UNEP and Danny Rahdiansyah, Indonesia's Deputy Permanent Representative for UNEP and UN-Habitat, and Counsellor at the Indonesia's Embassy in Nairobi.

Government of the Republic of Indonesia, represented by Inge Retnowati, Director of Inland Waters and Mangrove Rehabilitation of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, explained that Indonesia was started the effort of Lake management in a structured way in 2009, by improving the process, from the form of scientific discussion, into a formulation of scientific based policy brief and political mainstreaming, while also improving technical approach at the field level. Concerning some challenges, particularly on diverse of interests among sectors, and drivers of the lake's condition which is related to economic expectation of the people surrounding, the efforts are made by developing understanding on the urgency and roles needed, among all relevant stakeholders. Concerns and commitments were then raised into the proposal of global resolution on Sustainable Lake Management, which is adopted at the UNEA 5 in Nairobi, Kenya, 2022. Indonesia's commitments on Sustainable Lake Management comprises of at least five main aspects, i.e governance, community-based program, physical development, lessons learned and international cooperation.

Government of Australia, represented by Lou-Ellen Martin, Director of Urban Water and International Engagement, Strategic Policy and Engagement Branch, Water Division, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, congratulated Indonesia for leadership for this issue, and also acknowledged the strong relationship between two countries to share from water issues, including lake management and pilot water emergency. Australia considers the principle of sustainable lake management that set up in the UNEA resolution, and would like to share a case study to illustrate how Australia

has path the principle to improve the management of the Coorong, Lower Lakes, and Murray Mount area in, which is one of the Australia most important wetland area, located in the southern in Murray-Darling Basin, has unique species, native plants, animal, migratory birds, and also important social, spiritual, and cultural locations for the area first nation people. The Lake is affected by drought in the year of 2000, and this need around 8 years to be able to flush out and polluted the ecosystem, became 4 times saltier. So, native plant and animal could not survive.

There are set of 3 actions which is in line with the principles of sustainable lake management. *Firstly*, governance. Major changes in the water governance arrangements to achieving better outcomes in managing water resources across south national boundaries. This includes legislative reform for new Federal Water Act introduced and also the development Murray-Darling Basin Plan under the Act. This what provides coordinative approach to water use across Murry-Darling Basin. *Second* action, valuing the environment, balancing environmental social cultural and economic considerations in the Basin Plan, and setting water use to environmentally sustainable water level and limiting how much water could be used by all users, communities, farmers, industries, and others, while keeping the river and wells in healthy condition. The Plan also able to deliver the water for the environment to support the drought area, substantially avoiding environmental degradation. *Finally*, embracing all stakeholders, including Australia first nation people, who have more than 65.000 years experiences in managing water resources in changing climate, applying “yarning circle”, a conservation culture to share experiences and knowledge between first nation and government, which support decision making in delivery environmental water. Australia also implements the sustainable management of lake in an inclusive process and scientific understanding of integrated basin scale, and committing to protect water resources and freshwater ecosystems. One significant way is by renewing national water policy frameworks, as Australia’s water action agenda.



European Union, represented by Astrid Schomaker, Director for Green Diplomacy and Multilateralism, highlighted that EU aware that water is often taken for granted whereas the reality has become that we are confronted with either ‘too little’ (including not good enough) or ‘too much’ water with increasing frequency, while climate change is expected to make matters worse. Facing those challenges, EU has made various efforts to achieve water resilience, with the main aim of the water policy is to identify and implement actions to ensure that water is available throughout. In this regard, sectoral coordination is key, to ensure sufficient quantities and good quality.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), represented by Elisabeth (Lis) Mullin Bernhardt, Freshwater Unit, Marine and Freshwater Ecosystem, informed the development of UNEP's lakes portal which contains key information about freshwater ecosystem, and what UNEP (and partners) are doing to protect, sustainably manage and restore them, at the link <https://www.decadeonecosystemrestoration.org/healthy-and-productive-lakes>; and capacity-building initiative which brings together a wide variety of stakeholders (from community-level users and local water forums to multilateral and bilateral organizations, as well as the private sector) from the water and related sectors at all levels to develop and strengthen capacities for the protection, management and restoration of 28 selected lakes. UNEP also campaigns through the #LoveLakes Campaign, to build a social media advocacy push whereby UNEP colleagues showcase reasons why they enjoy spending time around lakes. Along with the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, UNEP is supporting countries with monitoring changes to water-related ecosystems and reporting progress towards SDG target 6.6.

RAMSAR Secretariat, led by Dr. Musonda Mumba, Secretary General of the RAMSAR Convention on Wetlands, congratulated the government of Indonesia for conducting the event, which is closely related to the COP14 of RAMSAR and COP 28 of CBD. This year is time for wetland restoration. Sharing experiences from India, how level of degradation, pollution, siltation, had severe implication on pollution. The changes such on Policy Framework in India make sure that improvement in the lake system was able to actually support the community, in which very much depend on the fishery resources. Prespa Lake is shared between Albania, Greece, and Macedonia needs the transboundary management. UNEA Resolution 5.4 is important resolution. Focusing on SDGs target 6.6.1 on extend one of the changes happen and how we improved. Data is important. Collaboration is really the high-top element, seeing how we come together and share experiences. Ramsar Secretariat also be able to support the countries to review achievement of the related SDGs.



International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), led by Dr. Jo Puri, Associate Vice President for Strategy and Knowledge Department, explained that IFAD takes a comprehensive approach to climate risk reduction, oftentimes combining “hard” infrastructure investments with “soft” technical and capacity development approaches. IFAD also ensures that water communities are fully engaged in decision-making and management, and this inclusive approach reinforces the government's commitment to freshwater ecosystems and the water nexus. Because IFAD targets rural food system transformation and uses the water nexus approach, its projects increasingly illustrate co-benefits: for example, if the entry point is freshwater or wetland management for improved livelihoods, it supports resilience and adaptation- as well as nutrition- and health-related outcomes.

International Lake Environment Committee Foundation (ILEC), led by Dr. Masahisa Nakamura, Vice President of ILEC, shared experiences on Lake Biwa restoration in Japan, since 1970, after centuries of floods, droughts, and utilization conflicts. One important lesson learning point is broad societal engagement in the restoration. With support from Japan Government, Shiga Prefecture, UN Agencies and ILEC Scientists, ILEC implements some program, among others scientific knowledge development and sharing, implementing Integrated Lake Basin Management (ILBM) platform development to support national governments, organizing capacity development with regional focus, and conducting World Lake Conferences with focus on Sustainable Lake Management.

World Water Quality Alliance (WWQA), represented by Nina Raasakka, Programme Management Officer Coordinator, Global Environment Monitoring Unit, explained about WWQA, among others on the Ecosystems Workstream of the WWQA which open membership to assess and improve water quality with a focus on freshwater restoration, established in 2021 to support large-scale restoration initiatives to prevent, halt and redress the destruction of freshwater ecosystems, focusing initially on water quality management in lakes and their catchments. In 2021-2022 the workstream implemented a Global Survey on the factors important for lake restoration in several languages and identifying important case studies and launched White Paper on Lake Restoration. WWQA also launched Report on the Global Survey entitled: "Global Survey on Lake Restoration in Practice".

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), represented by Dr. Sarantuyaa Zandaryaa, Programme Specialist of Division of Water Sciences, Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP). UNESCO develop science for sustainable lake management, particularly innovative technological and nature-based approaches. UNESCO established "Lake Chad", a water quality monitoring portal. UNESCO also develop global network on ecohydrology demonstration site. In addition, about 70% of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves are water-related ecosystems, including many lakes. UNESCO support 257 natural world heritage sites in 111 countries, where 2/3 of them are crucial water sources.

Community and Influencer, represented by Nadya Hutagalung. Nadya was delighted to beam in with the hope that she can inspire the important discussions on the state of the world water bodies and the critical role that healthy lakes play in the wellbeing of humans and non-humans alike. For years the science has been predicting what we are now witnessing. We need nature, lakes, rivers that ensure the productivity of our planet.



Global Youth Movement for Water, represented by Wendy Omanga, was enthusiastic and supports efforts to save water sources, through learning and activities carried out. This is expected could motivate other young people to be involved in the water management and share their experiences. The movement concern on Lake Victoria, which is the largest freshwater lake in Africa and is shared by Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Sustainable management of the lake is crucial for its long-term health and the livelihoods of the communities that depend on it. One of the commitments to sustainable management of Lake Victoria in Kenya is collaborative effort among stakeholders. World Scouts Parliamentary Union Kenya is actively involved in the efforts.



Closing remarks and the way forward

Director of Ecosystem Division, UNEP, Dr. Susan Gardner, highlighted the inspiring stories and commitments from the speakers, and appreciated Indonesia for leadership and



really being a leader in the Lake resolution. Some important points from the speakers are concluded, among others, importance of scientific basis; innovative tools to advance the work; importance of collaboration, sharing of the information and knowledge, and networks; and new portal on ecosystem restoration that is available for all. Understanding the interconnections among various drivers, the three planetary crisis of biodiversity loss, pollution and climate change, and the land use, agriculture and fisheries, highlighted the importance of inclusive processes involve all stakeholders including local communities and indigenous communities, recognizing and incorporating the valuable knowledge.


It is essential to work to implement the Lake resolution through comprehensive integrated approaches, regarding the connections between upland and lowland. Connecting to the commitments under the Ramsar convention, the global biodiversity framework, and the target for 30% of inland freshwater being protected by 2030. The importance of this work for sustainable development, for nature, and for addressing the planetary crisis. Concerning that we have just seven years now to deliver work on the SDGs, it is now critical to advance progress of the action. This event has shown that commitment among all of us.

Director General of Environmental Pollution and Degradation Control, Ministry of Environment and Forestry Indonesia, Sigit Reliantoro, expressed that the event finally concluded that all parties are on the same page to achieve the common goals on Lakes and other freshwater ecosystems. Commitments highlighted are being paths that open barriers in the next journey, which requires hard work and strength collective effort. The meeting participants are of the view that there is a great opportunity for collaboration, and expressed their readiness to work together in accordance with the activity program that has become a commitment.



All parties are expected to be more open to support each other. Knowledge, information, best practices, and opportunities to collaborate that have already been shared at this event, hopefully could be implemented soon through strengthen of action steps in a good circumstance and understanding. In that vein, we are confident that we can reinvigorate and reignite the zeal and passion we have to jointly address several and various challenges that we face.

At the opportunity, Indonesia invited all participants to attend the upcoming World Water Forum, which will be held in Bali, Indonesia, May 2024.



Information of the event could be reached at <https://sdgs.un.org/conferences/water2023> and https://bit.ly/UNWC2023_LAKE; and the video of the event could be downloaded through UN Webcast <http://webtv.un.org> at <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1s/k1szyix6af>.

The event's materials are inputs for the High Level Political Forum on SDGs, under the auspices of UN General Assembly, in September 2023. Further, within this framework, several upcoming water related global fora would be valuable opportunities, to share-and-learn to improve performance and collaboration, among others, the 19th World Lake Conference in Balantofured, Hungary, November 2023, the 6th UNEA, in Nairobi, Kenya, February 2024, and the 10th World Water Forum in Bali, Indonesia, May 2024.

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