

The Victoria Falls Declaration: Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future
High-Level Segment of the 15th Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on
Wetlands (COP 15), Zimbabwe (Version 3)

ACKNOWLEDGING:

- The critical ecological, socio-cultural and economic importance of wetlands, their global significance for sustainable human livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, the ecosystem services they provide, and their role in climate change mitigation and adaptation
- That more than 35% of wetlands have disappeared since 1971, and that their degradation jeopardizes the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide.
- The crucial roles of wetlands in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1,2,3,5,6,7,9,11,13,14, and 15) by 2030, and the goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Paris Agreement and UNCCD 2018 – 2030 Strategic Framework.
- The significant global and local threats facing wetland ecosystems as outlined in the Global Wetland Outlook 2018, such as drainage, pollution, invasive species, unsustainable water and land use, disrupted flow regimes and climate change.
- That marine wetlands face numerous threats which include unsustainable development, overexploitation, pollution, invasive species, and the impacts of climate change like sea-level rise and increased storm intensity.
- The challenges affecting wetland conservation, restoration and wise use, especially in the context of desertification, deforestation and the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.
- The urgent need for enhanced transboundary collaboration and integrated approaches for the conservation, restoration, sustainable management and wise use of all wetland ecosystems.
- The global and local challenges and the main global drivers of wetlands loss, such as degradation of wetlands, climate change, unsustainable agricultural and forestry practices, urbanization, wild fires and pollution and the need to address them to halt and reverse biodiversity loss in these ecosystems and promote the conservation, restoration, sustainable management, and wise use of wetlands.

RECOGNIZING the importance of promoting synergies and complementarity between the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands with International Organisations and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and frameworks, including, but not limited to, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to strengthen actions for the conservation,

restoration and sustainable management of wetlands, and in a manner fully consistent with their mandate and priorities.

HIGHLIGHTING the importance of mobilizing financial resources from all sources to effectively implement the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands' Mission which is conservation and wise use of all wetlands.

RECOGNIZING that the effective implementation of policies for the conservation, restoration, sustainable management and wise use of wetlands is dependent upon provision of financial resources, capacity building, technical and scientific cooperation, particularly to support the needs of developing countries

EMPHASISING the vital role of youth, women and girls in the conservation, restoration, sustainable management and wise use of wetlands and **RECOGNIZING** the importance of full, equal and inclusive participation of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities and the role of their traditional knowledge.

REITERATING the importance of the full and effective participation of Indigenous People, based on free, prior and informed consent in accordance with the relevant international framework, in particular, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, highlighting the relevance of their practices and knowledge for the conservation, restoration and wise use of wetlands.

RECOGNIZING the urgent need for strong political will, realistic and concrete measures to promote the conservation, restoration, sustainable management and wise and use of all types of wetlands, and to prevent or mitigate the impacts associated with their continued loss and degradation globally.

We, the Ministers, gathered at the High-level Segment of COP 15, will, while respecting our mandates endeavour to:

- Strengthen policy and legal frameworks by mainstreaming wetland conservation into local, national and regional plans, policies and strategies and where appropriate, ensure alignment with international commitments such as through the submission of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), while ensuring that alignment avoids duplication of reporting obligations and considers national capacities and legal frameworks.
- Strengthen the Convention's links with International Organisation and other MEAs, in particular the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to increase Ramsar Convention on Wetland's visibility, encouraging cooperation and supporting their

implementation.

- Improve integrated planning and management by promoting collaboration among relevant Government Agencies, Indigenous Peoples, ethnic groups and local communities, and other stakeholders for the sustainable management of wetlands.
- Support cooperation between the Contracting Parties to the Convention and, in particular, the implementation of the Convention through the Ramsar Regional Initiatives.
- Promote the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of wetlands, particularly degraded wetlands of socio economic and or ecological interest to the local population and which form a network of national and /or regional sites, hosting migratory, threatened, and endemic species, by promoting the ecosystem approach and prioritizing the restoration of Ramsar-classified wetlands.
- Invest in scientific research and monitoring to better understand the ecology of wetlands, the economic, socio-cultural and ecological dynamics that make wetlands critical to people, the interventions that are effective in protecting them in different contexts and to establish robust inventory and monitoring systems, including community engagements and the use of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, remote sensing, and digital tools for real-time ecosystem tracking and adaptive management.
- Identify and mobilize resources from all sources to finance sustainable wetland interventions, programs and activities at local, national, regional and international levels to support the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan and to deliver the conservation, restoration, sustainable management and wise use of wetlands by 2030 and beyond, considering the special needs and circumstances of developing countries, and in line with the national priorities and capacities and relevant international obligations and commitments.
- Empower women, youth, girls, children and persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and civil society, to participate in the conservation, restoration, sustainable management, and wise use of wetland ecosystems through awareness raising and capacity building.
- Consider the potential of wetlands to support sustainable value chains and nature-based livelihoods that contribute to rural development and community well-being.
- Prioritize the conservation and restoration of degraded wetlands, including those hosting migratory, threatened and endemic species and the use of nature-based solutions and /or ecosystems based approaches supported by guidance and frameworks provided by International Conventions.
- Consider socio-cultural, economic, and environmental challenges—including biodiversity loss, climate change, pollution, land and water degradation, deforestation, desertification, and disaster risks—in the development and implementation of national legislation, plans, and actions for wetlands

conservation, restoration and wise use.

- Recognize and enhance the role of wetlands in disaster risk reduction and climate resilience, including their capacity to buffer extreme weather events, reduce flooding, and support drought resilience through nature-based solutions
- Integrate relevant cross-cultural considerations into the conservation, restoration and sustainable management and planning of wetlands while implementing ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation measures to enhance the resilience of both wetlands and the communities that rely on them.

Call upon:

- **Contracting Parties** to protect their wetlands and intensify basic and applied research and share their experiences, insights, perspectives, best practices, technologies and innovations in managing wetlands, as appropriate, and where possible, consider cooperation in management approaches to land use in border regions, shared watercourses, contiguous mangroves and coral reefs, while fully respecting national sovereignty, national priorities and legal frameworks, and ensuring that any cross-border cooperation is voluntary and based on mutual consent.
- **International Organization Partners** to support the mobilization of financial resources internationally, regionally and nationally with Parties, and to continue to strengthen their financial and technical support for the conservation, restoration, sustainable management and wise use of wetlands globally.
- **Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), international financial institutions** and regional banks to mobilise and provide support to developing countries in contributing to conservation, restoration, sustainable management and wise use of wetlands.
- **The private sector** to use existing nature-related tools and mechanisms to understand impacts and dependencies on wetlands, including in value chains, in order to minimize potential negative impacts on wetland biodiversity, and to provide financial and technical support towards the implementation of conservation and sustainable wetland management programs and projects.
- **Civil society** to actively participate and communicate its opinion and needs in political, economic and scientific processes on conservation and wise use of wetlands.

We believe that by taking these actions, we can contribute significantly to meeting our commitments under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and thus leave a lasting legacy for wetland conservation.

-----END-----