



## **France gives major boost to international water convention**

Palais du Pharo, Marseille, France, 3 June 2010 - France is set to become the 20th country to sign up to a key international convention governing the use and protection of rivers and lakes crossing or forming international boundaries.

The announcement, made this morning by French Secretary of State for Ecology Chantal Jouanno at the kick off meeting of the 6th World Water Forum to be held in Marseille in 2012, is a major boost for the 13 years old UN Watercourses Convention, which requires 35 contracting parties to come into effect. The Secretary of State for Ecology went on to say that France will actively promote ratification of the Convention.

France's accession, which follows that of Guinea-Bissau in May and Spain and Tunisia in 2009, still requires the French Senate to give the green light to a bill authorizing the ratification of the convention. France's National Assembly passed this measure last month.

France's move has been welcomed by Green Cross International (GCI), the International Network of Basin Organisations (INBO) and WWF, three major organisations that have long campaigned for the convention as the basis for peaceful resolution of disputes over water sharing in international rivers, lakes and aquifers.

"More than 100 nations voted for the UN Watercourses Convention in 1997," said Flavia Loures, leader of the campaign for the widespread endorsement of the convention within WWF's Global Freshwater Programme. "They voted for it because they recognised then that you can have agreement or you can have conflict over water.

"While additional agreements over specific transboundary waters have been adopted between countries since, many such agreements fail to deal with key water management issues. The world still very much needs the fair and overall blueprint supplied by the UN Watercourses Convention."

"As we increasingly wake up to a world of water shortages linked to climate change, economic growth and urbanisation, we are seeing more and more interest in discussions on transboundary water issues, and more and more interest in the convention."

"Acceding to the Convention will not create new obligations for French rivers as they are already subject to more stringent European Union rules. The announcement made by France, as the host country of the next World Water Forum, sends a strong message to the international community on the importance of improving transboundary water management" said Marie-Laure Vercambre, the Water Programme Leader of Green Cross International.

"France has been anxious to promote an international legal regime for water, the principles of integrated water resources management included in the Convention and a framework for peace within the geopolitics of water."

Currently the only legal instrument dealing with global management of transboundary waters, the UN Watercourses Convention potentially sets standards and rules for cooperation between states sharing some 276 international watercourses - including many of the world's major river systems such as the Amazon, Rio Grande, Indus, Ganges, Mekong, Amur, Nile, Congo, Rhine and Danube.

The convention establishes the principles of equitable and reasonable use of and participation in the sound management of international watercourses, codifies the rights and duties of riparian states, promotes dialogue and data sharing, and facilitates negotiations on the adoption of regional and watercourse treaties.

"France has been at the forefront of national river basin management and transboundary issues since the

Water Act of 1964 creating the Basin Committees and Water Agencies," said Jean-François Donzier, Permanent Technical Secretary of INBO. "The rules that the UN Watercourses Convention establishes reflect this French model of river basin management that has now been adopted by some sixty countries around the world.

"This model also inspired the European Union Water Framework Directive, which itself created obligations for the coordinated management of transboundary rivers and mandatory participation of all stakeholders, including civil society, in the water management process.

"France encourages the implementation of these principles of governance within the framework of its international cooperation, in particular by supporting the International Network of Basin Organizations."

The Convention will soon count 20 contracting states, including France – that is, 15 short of the number required for entry into force.

#### **About Green Cross International**

Green Cross International (GCI) is a leading environmental organisation. Founded by President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1993, this non-profit and non-governmental organisation promotes a combination of high level advocacy with key international stakeholders, runs campaigns and manages local projects to address the inter-connected global challenges of security, poverty eradication and environmental degradation. GCI is present in over 30 countries and has its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. More information about GCI is available at [www.gci.ch](http://www.gci.ch) and on twitter @GreenCrossInt

#### **About Europe-INBO**

The Europe-INBO group of European basin organizations was created in 2004 to implement the Water Framework Directive by the concerned members of the International Network of Basin Organizations for exchanging field experiences and reporting to the EU Commission about the implementation difficulties. Europe-INBO also presented at the November 2008 EU Water Directors meeting a mid-term report on the transboundary cooperation organized among the riparian States of European shared watercourses. More information on [www.inbo-news.org](http://www.inbo-news.org)

#### **About WWF**

WWF is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with more than 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption. [www.panda.org](http://www.panda.org)

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