

First International Environment Forum for Basin Organizations

Freshwater Governance beyond Rio +20: Meeting the Sustainability Challenge

FINAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Co-convened by
the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand



In partnership with:



International Association for Water Law
Association Internationale du Droit de l'Eau
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DU DROIT DES EAUX



I. Background

The state of global freshwater resources is in crisis. Rivers, lakes, aquifers, wetlands, and other water bodies are being strained as human populations swell and economies expand. Both surface and groundwater resources are being depleted and polluted to an extent never before witnessed. And species, habitats, and ecosystems, as well as people and communities around the globe are increasingly suffering for it.

Existing governance structures are, in most cases, primarily geared towards providing policy, legal and institutional frameworks for satisfying human water demand. Often these frameworks insufficiently, if at all, address the protection and sustainable use of the actual freshwater resources and related ecosystems. Effective cooperative arrangements for the joint management of transboundary basins which recognize the environmental dimension in the governance of these vital resources is indispensable as new challenges, such as climate change, arise.

II. Objective

The 1st International Environment Forum for basin organizations will create a platform for basin organizations from all around the globe to work together towards strengthening the governance and management of transboundary basins through the adequate consideration and integration of environmental aspects.

Basin organizations will have a unique opportunity to share experiences and best practices in meeting the environmental challenges they face and to discuss new approaches, build concrete partnerships and establish mechanisms for improving their capacities.

III. Expected Outcomes

- The establishment of a regular platform for basin organizations to debate and work towards improving the governance and management of transboundary freshwater resources;
- Strengthened legal, policy, financial and institutional mechanisms to support basin organizations in meeting environmental challenges for both surface and groundwater resources;
- Priority actions to strengthen the ecosystems in transboundary basins applicable to both surface and groundwater resources identified by stakeholders;
- Increased political and institutional support to international cooperative frameworks for the sustainable management of transboundary basins;
- Contributions by basins organizations to international processes and fora such as the UNFCCC, the Stockholm World Water Week, the World Water Forum and others.

IV. Themes

1. **Ecosystems and Biodiversity Conservation:** Ecosystems and their services are experiencing rapid and tremendous degradation and loss, posing a variety of threats to the sustainability of both surface and groundwater resources. As human populations swell and economies expand the water needs of the environment are often neglected in water management practices, the result of which has already gravely impacted the aquatic environment. Maintaining and restoring healthy and functioning ecosystems in the basins is increasingly a major contribution by basin organizations towards achieving sustainable development and in implementing a "greener" path of economic development.

2. **Adapting to Climate Change:** The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has made it very clear that climate change will have serious impacts on the world's freshwater resources. Many countries and regions - in particular arid and semi-arid regions of the developing world - are already experiencing the added effects of increased unpredictability and magnitude as well as frequency of precipitation-related disasters as a result of climatic changes. The governance and management of transboundary freshwater basins will play a crucial role in responding to climate change. Moreover, the major challenges to climate change adaptation are anticipated to be within the sphere of both surface and groundwater resources development and management.
3. **Environmental Laws and Regulations:** International water law has evolved beyond its people-focused and commerce-based origins and has expanded to address environmental protection issues. This process is significant for international basin organizations and further embodied in the adoption of a great number of international environmental agreements and the elaboration of internationally accepted environmental principles. Similarly, an increasing number of countries have taken a "greener" approach to balancing socio-economic development and environmental protection when drafting and reviewing domestic water related laws and regulations applicable to both surface and groundwater resources.
4. **Institutional Challenges:** The effective and sensible governance of the world's freshwater resources requires strong and adequate policy, legal, financial and institutional mechanisms to deal with the multiple economic, social and environmental challenges. Existing governance structures are, in most cases, primarily geared towards providing policy, legal and institutional frameworks for satisfying human water demand. Often these frameworks insufficiently, if at all, address the particular capacity needs of basin organizations required for the protection and sustainable use of both surface and groundwater resources and their related ecosystem services.

THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT

The High Level segment will discuss the way forward for sustainable governance and management of transboundary basins based on the outcomes of the deliberation on Forum's topics. This segment will provide some guidance on how to meet overarching policy agendas, such as those expressed in the MDGs and in the MEAs. The outcomes of this segment are intended to stimulate further policy dialogue at the Rio+20 Conference.

V. Target Audience

The Conference will bring together key stakeholders in the management of transboundary basins, such as heads of basin organizations and country heads of delegations to basin organizations, UN Agencies and other relevant international institutions, international financial institutions, MEA Secretariats, civil society and academia. The High Level segment will gather Ministers of Environment and Water Resources as well as high level civil servants especially involved in basin organizations' ministerial commissions.

VI. Venue

- The Conference will be held at the UN Conference Center in Bangkok, Thailand, from 26 to 28 October 2011.
- The languages of the Conference will be English, French and Spanish (interpretation will be provided during plenary sessions and the High Level Segment).
- UNEP will provide limited financial resources to enable the participation of representatives from developing countries and countries with economies in transition.
- To register for the conference please contact: arnold.kreilhuber@unep.org or lara.ognibene@unep.org
- Carbon Neutrality: To minimise the carbon footprint, the Forum will be conducted, inter alia, as a paperless meeting. Participants are encouraged to access documents electronically during the Forum through the wireless network at the conference venue and/or download them prior to the conference at www.unep.org/delc/forumbasinorganizations.

VII. Provisional Timetable

24 and 25 October 2011

Consultative Pre-Session Event for African Basin Organizations

DAY 1: 26 October 2011

09:00 – 10:30: Opening plenary session including keynote speech on the themes for day 1

Thematic sessions (in parallel)

Theme 1 – Ecosystems and Biodiversity Conservation

10:30 – 16:30

- Moderated panel discussion
- Lunch
- General discussion on the theme

Theme 2 – Adapting to Climate Change

10:30 – 16:30

- Moderated panel discussion
- Lunch
- General discussion on the theme

16:30 – 17:30: Closing plenary session for day 1

DAY 2: 27 October 2011

09:00 – 10:30: Opening plenary session including keynote speech on the themes for day 2

Thematic sessions (in parallel)

Theme 3 – Environmental Laws and Regulations

10:30 – 16:30

- Moderated panel discussion
- Lunch
- General discussion on the theme

Theme 4 – Institutional Challenges

10:30 – 16:30

- Moderated panel discussion
- Lunch
- General discussion on the theme

16:30 – 17:30: Closing plenary session for day 2

DAY 3: 28 October 2011

09:00 – 17:00 High Level Segment: Freshwater Governance beyond Rio +20

Basin organizations are vital constituents of the international environmental governance system. A High Level Roundtable will give high-level participants the opportunity to reflect on the role, challenges and opportunities of these institutions and to formulate the overall conclusions of the 1st International Environment Forum for Basin Organizations and recommendations for improved freshwater governance in the lead-up to Rio +20 and beyond.

The High Level Segment will be accessible to all participants. The High Level Roundtable will be composed of Ministers, heads of basin organizations and other invited high-level participants.

VIII. List of Partners

- African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW)
- Asian Development Bank (ADB)
- International Association for Water Law (AIDA)
- International Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH)
- International Bar Association (IBA)
- International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO)
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- The League of Arab States
- Mekong River Commission (MRC)
- The Organization of American States (OAS)
- Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
- Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI)
- United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)
- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
- UNECE Water Convention
- UNESCO-International Hydrological Programme (IHP)

For more information please visit: www.unep.org/delc/forumbasinorganizations