



World Water Day: Action needed against droughts and floods, to protect people from global water crisis

21 March 2012 – Green Cross International is marking World Water Day by calling for intensified action to protect the hundreds of millions of people whose lives and wellbeing are endangered by the global water crisis and related food security challenges, particularly in the face of more frequent and intense drought and flooding.

“It was a relief to hear the UN recently state the Millennium Development Goal for access to safe drinking water would be met. But much remains to be done. Almost 800 million people still live without access to safe water and three times that number lack sanitation systems,” says Marie-Laure Vercambre, Director of Green Cross International’s Water for Life and Peace Programme.

“Unlike the goal for water, the target to provide more people with basic sanitation will unlikely be met. We know climate change, industrialization and poor sharing of water are the key drivers of the world water crisis. So why are we not doing more to implement the necessary actions to ensure all people have access to water and sanitation, which is a basic human right?”

Green Cross International, the nongovernmental organization founded by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1993 to address the nexus of environmental degradation, insecurity and poverty, is calling for nations to support two essential initiatives: implementation of the Human Right to Water and Sanitation in their own countries, and ratification of the United Nations Watercourses Convention for sharing cross-border rivers and connected watercourses.

“Governments can legislate to enshrine the Right to Water and Sanitation in their constitutions and laws, and invest resources in ensuring their people have access to these fundamental, life-giving needs,” Ms Vercambre says. “Members of the international community all have a role to play. Developed countries must respect their 0.7% of GDP commitment for Official Development Assistance to boost access to water and sanitation in developing countries.”

“Proper global water governance still is at an early stage,” Ms Vercambre continues, “but by ratifying the UN Watercourses Convention, States will provide the world with a strong framework to best share the 276 transboundary rivers, the basins of which are home to 40% of the world’s population.”

The 1997 UN Watercourses Convention is the only global legal instrument to govern the use and management of the world’s 276 cross-border watercourses. Some 145 countries share these rivers and groundwaters linked to them. But only 40% of international watercourses are covered by agreements on how to share, protect and manage them, many of which are unsatisfactory. Thirty-five countries must ratify the convention for it to come into force. So



far, 24 countries have done so, while Luxembourg announced at the recent World Water Forum that it too would ratify it.

“Better sharing and management of water can ensure it is available for more people, especially those suffering from food insecurity in many parts of the world, particularly sub-Saharan Africa and the Horn of Africa,” says Adam Koniuszewski, Chief Operating Officer of Green Cross International. “This is why the UN Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB) recommends ratification of the UN Watercourses Convention. We also support the focus the international community will place on [cooperation on water](#) during World Water Year 2013. While awareness raising is vital for addressing the water crisis, what the world needs is real action.”

Green Cross participated in the recent World Water Forum, where it advocated for the ratification of the UN Watercourses Convention and highlighted the links between the water crisis, sustainability and environmental degradation, including the harmful effects of climate change.

Encouraging developments were announced at the Forum. West Africa confirmed its leadership in addressing the water challenges in a regional, integrated and sustainable manner. The Senegal River Organisation reaffirmed its endorsement of the UN Watercourses Convention and its ongoing promotion among the four countries linked to the Senegal River. Those of the Niger Basin also reaffirmed their commitment to consider ratification.

Green Cross focuses on the nexus between environment, development and security. Its Water for Life and Peace Programme actively promotes ratification of the UN Watercourses Convention and implementation of the UN-recognized Right to Water and Sanitation. Green Cross also installs systems to provide sustainable water supplies and hygiene services in communities in Africa and Latin America. GCI is an independent non-profit and nongovernmental organization headquartered in Geneva and present in over 30 countries.

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