**More than 1,000 global events to celebrate World Wetlands Day on 2 February**

• Wetlands act as natural safeguards against disasters. They protect communities most at risk and vulnerable to the devastating effects of floods, droughts and storm surges.

• The frequency of natural hazards worldwide has more than doubled in just 35 years. 90% of all natural hazards are water-related.

• By 2050, loss of wetlands, rising populations, climate change and rising sea levels are set to increase the number of people vulnerable to floods to 2 billion.

• Well-managed wetlands make communities resilient in the event of extreme weather and help to minimize the damage from floods, hurricanes and droughts.

• Each year, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands celebrates 2 February as ‘World Wetlands Day’ to raise global awareness of the importance of wetlands.

**Gland, Switzerland | 1 February 2017 -**  More than 1000 events have been organized around the world to celebrate World Wetlands Day on 2 February under the umbrella theme for 2017 “Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction”.

The frequency of natural hazards worldwide has more than doubled in just 35 years and their frequency is set to increase due to climate change. Furthermore according to Un-Water an estimated 90% of natural hazards are water related.

Healthy and well managed wetlands function as ‘natural infrastructure’ defending us from the catastrophic effects of natural hazards. Coastal wetlands such as mangroves, coral reefs, sea grass and tidal marshes protect us against flooding and storm surges. Inland wetlands such as floodplains, lakes and peatlands act as a ‘natural sponge’, storing excess rainfall and reducing flooding, then releasing stored water during the dry season to delay the onset of droughts.

However, wetlands are being destroyed or degraded faster than any other ecosystem. Latest figures show that 64% of the world’s wetlands have disappeared in the last century, and that every year we lose 1% of those remaining. Wetlands are drained or degraded to meet the increasing demands for water and land to cater for agriculture, industry and a growing urban population.

Each year, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands celebrates 2 February as ‘World Wetlands Day’ to raise global awareness of the importance of wetlands and the need for their conservation and sustainable use.

 “It is crucial that more voices speak up for wetlands, more people become informed of their value and more decisive actions are taken to conserve and restore this valuable ecosystem. We seek to mobilize global actions that will lead to the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of all wetlands,” Said Martha Rojas Urrego, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

“We encourage policy-makers, experts and community leaders to consider wetlands as an extremely cost-effective and win-win solution for disaster risk reduction. Decision-makers should therefore make significant efforts to integrate wetlands in cross-sectoral disaster risk reduction policies and strategies.” She added.

Wetlands are also vital because they provide food for more than three billion people worldwide and are a source of freshwater and livelihoods for over one billion people. They are also crucial for adaptation to and mitigation of climate change. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without a decisive action for their conservation.

Parties to the Ramsar Convention have designated over 2,250 Wetlands of International Importance or ‘Ramsar Sites’, which are protected for the benefits they provide to the country and the world.

**New Ramsar Sites for World Wetlands Day**

On World Wetlands Day, 2 February 2017 there are **2,260** Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) covering over **215,000,000 hectares** (2.15 million square kilometres).

**Madagascar** has designated **five large Sites**. The country now has 15 Sites, which support the protection of over 1.5 million hectares of habitats critical to the island’s unique biodiversity. These latest designations were achieved with the support of WWF Madagascar. The Sites host unique and extraordinarily rich ecosystems, and are of great economic, social and cultural importance in their respective regions.

**Myanmar** has designated **Meinmahla Kyun Wildlife Sanctuary**, a coastal wetland in the southern part of the Irrawaddy Delta, which is also an ASEAN Heritage Park. It supports one of the largest remaining mangrove areas of in the Delta, where mangrove ecosystems have declined due to activities including logging, fishing and development of shipping lanes.

**France** has designated **Marais Breton, Baie de Bourgneuf, Ile de Noirmoutier et Forêt de Monts**. This Site, of almost 56,000 hectares, is France’s 45th. It covers one of the main areas of coastal marshes and tidal bays on the French Atlantic coast.

**Italy** has designated **Trappola Marshland - Ombrone River Mouth** as its 53rd Wetland of International Importance. The new Ramsar Site, located on the Tyrrhenian coast of Tuscany, represents one of the last remnants of a partly salty and partly freshwater complex of wetlands and sandy dunes.

In the preceding days, **Ukraine** designated two new Wetlands of International Importance,

**Byle Lake and Koza Berezyna Mire** and **Archipelago Velyki** and **Mali Kuchugury.**

For more information on wetlands and World Wetlands Day visit:

World Wetlands Day 2017 website: the Ramsar Convention Secretariat has assembled a range of information materials to support country activities and highlight how effective wetlands are in reducing the risk of disasters.

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is the international legal instrument linking 169 countries which have committed to the conservation and wise use of wetlands. It is the only global treaty to focus on a single ecosystem. The Convention was signed in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and entered into force in 1975.

Wetlands are the key natural assets which link sustainable development and the water cycle tightly together. In this sense the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is a unique instrument for supporting sustainable development. It is therefore very significant that wetlands are specifically mentioned twice within the Sustainable Development Goals, under Goal 6 for Water as well as under Goal 15 for Biodiversity.

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