

## LIVING LAKES INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE DECLARATION OF LAKE TITICACA 2022



### **The conservation and restoration of the world's wetlands and lakes, needs urgent global and local action**

Over the last three hundred years, we have lost about 85% of our lakes and wetlands. Wetlands - one of the most economically valuable ecosystems and essential regulators of the world's climate - are disappearing three times faster than forests. A Ramsar Global Report published in 2018 highlights that approximately 35% of the world's wetlands were lost between 1970 and 2015 and the rate of loss is accelerating annually since 2000. This reality is more than worrying.

It is human activities that have caused and continue to cause degradation and loss of wetlands by changing water quality, quantity and flows, increasing urbanisation along lakeshores, increasing inputs of pollutants and changing species composition, for example through overfishing and the introduction of invasive species. With the disappearance of lakes and wetlands, people lose the biodiversity and ecosystem services essential to sustain human life and the planet.

The United Nations has more than 32 organisations working on water access and management around the world in a disjointed manner. Unified management is needed to enable effective action on access to and protection of the world's water resources, including the world's lakes and wetlands.

The 158 participants of the 16th International Living Lakes Conference, held in the city of Puno on the shores of the millenary Lake Titicaca, call on political decision-makers, the international community, civil society, academia and the private sector to take urgent action to protect and restore the world's lakes and wetlands.

### **In response to the Conference themes, participants noted that:**

- There is an urgent need to strengthen existing legal frameworks to effectively restore and protect lakes and wetlands. While the vast majority of countries have ratified the International Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention and passed laws for the protection of ecosystems, the degradation and destruction of lakes and wetlands has not stopped. Governments must ensure the full implementation of environmental laws and establish the corresponding sanctions for non-compliance. According to the "polluter pays" principle, those responsible for environmental damage must assume the consequences established in the Law.
- Strong institutional and financial frameworks are urgently needed to promote wetland restoration, including funding for restoration projects, citizens' initiatives and environmental organisations. Regional administrations with responsibilities for lake management should establish structures to involve different stakeholders and encourage public-private partnership restoration projects. Furthermore, companies in the basins

and/or with a strong relationship with water should contribute financially and participate in restoration initiatives.

- A World Water Fund is also needed to channel global resources to close the SDG gaps, as well as to ensure the protection of lakes and wetlands. Binding and coordinated action must start at the heart of the United Nations through a World Water Organisation that unifies the work of the agencies of the UN System as well as the Cooperation Agencies, in a way that harmonises global social and environmental demands.
- Binding, science-based action plans are needed as a framework and guidance for projects and other lake restoration initiatives. Lakeshores and watersheds should be included in the consideration of lake management plans. These habitats are critical to the viability of lake ecosystems. Since they are the interface between the lake itself and its users, special attention should be taken in planning and implementation in the case of these areas.
- An adequate and transparent monitoring system is also necessary to check whether the objectives of recovery, protection and management of a lake have been achieved. Monitoring results should be analysed and evaluated by independent scientists and the conclusions and recommendations should be considered in action and/or management plans. The monitoring reports have to be public and the management should inform all stakeholder representatives.
- A key element of a restoration plan must be to agree acceptable standards of water quality and quantity, acceptable to all water users and ensure that biodiversity thrives. The use of municipal wastewater treatment plants should be mandatory and their efficiency monitored. The implementation of Green Filters as "natural solutions" with low construction and maintenance costs for small settlements should be promoted and supported.
- Most lakes and wetlands are already heavily polluted. There is an urgent need to financially support the implementation of methods and technologies to improve water quality, as well as to support the further development of these techniques.
- More and more micro plastic is being detected in lakes all over the world. This new form of pollution can only be filtered out by technically advanced sewage treatment plants. We call on municipalities to take measures to reduce the use of plastic and to ban single-use plastic articles.
- Preventing pollution and unsustainable water abstraction is more important than technological solutions for remediation. Normally, local authorities are responsible for wastewater treatment. They need capacity building and financial resources in order to operate and maintain treatment plants properly. Households also need to recognise the importance of wastewater treatment and be willing to pay for this important service. This requires the implementation of strategies aimed at educating and raising awareness among the population.
- A major threat to the quality and quantity of water in a lake is intensive agriculture with unsustainable practices. Governments should implement aid programmes to support small farmers to become certified with ambitious sustainability standards. The goal

should be to at least double the area of organic agriculture around the lake by 2030. On the other hand, it is necessary to incentivise the transformation of the technical basis of irrigation systems, seeking to maximise their efficiency in the capture, transport and application of water for crops.

- The conservation status of lakes and wetlands informs their capacity to mitigate climate change. They are at their maximum carbon sequestration capacity when they are in a good state of conservation and they can become net emitters of greenhouse gases if they are degraded.
- In almost all lakes, fish stocks have declined and there have been significant losses of endemic species. This has a significant negative impact on the livelihood of Lake fishers, which is particularly significant given that fishers are often the poorest members of the community. The formation of Fisher Associations is encouraged, to improved fishery management and enable active involvement in lake management.
- Education and information campaigns aimed at improving local community understanding about the importance of lake and wetland ecosystems and associated ecosystem services is essential. National, regional and local governments should not be satisfied with low levels of awareness within lake and wetland communities,, who need to live with the impact of lake and wetland pollution and destruction.
- Community participation in lake restoration activities and projects is needed, as well as involving their perspectives and knowledge. The presence or absence of public support for a restoration project can be the difference between positive results and failure. It is therefore very important to encourage and support serious cooperation between public and private organisations.
- Participatory monitoring of lakes and wetlands should be implemented and strengthened as an inclusive tool for the identification and prioritisation of environmental problems. This must achieved through the involvement of civil society in the collection and analysis of data on water quality and quantity of water bodies, so that decision-making takes into account the vision of the lake and wetland communities, and enriches the perspectives on a highly complex issue.

All conference participants express their unreserved gratitude to the Binational Autonomous Authority of Lake Titicaca (Peru-Bolivia) and the Global Nature Fund for hosting the conference. The venue on the shores of Lake Titicaca and the excursions were instrumental in facilitating the high level of discussion among participants and reinforced the urgency of the actions needed to protect and restore wetlands and lakes worldwide.

Puno, 8 December 2022,

Signed by the members of the International Living Lakes Network and other conference participants