



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
OF THE  
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

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**on the occasion of**

**WORLD WETLANDS DAY**

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*“Wetlands for a sustainable urban future”*

Today some four billion people live in urban areas. In these human-built spaces, people tend to think of streets and buildings. At times, they also think of trees and parks. Less often do they think of marshes and other wetlands and the critical role these spaces play in making cities livable. Wetlands are essential for a sustainable urban future.

Wetlands are essential in so many ways. Wetlands, comprise some of the most important biodiverse areas in the world and provide freshwater and protection from flooding.

When preserved as green spaces in cities, wetlands offer spaces for recreation and access to a wide diversity of plant and animal life. Studies have shown that when city dwellers interact with nature, their stress is reduced and their health improved.

Wetlands are also a buffer against climate change and their ability to store large quantities of water reduces the impacts of natural disasters such as floods, droughts, storm surges, and help regulate urban temperature.

For example, during Hurricane Sandy, wetlands averted \$625 million in property damage in urban coastal areas of the US. Following the severe storms and the damaging floods that hit the Caribbean, the USA, Bangladesh and Nepal in 2017, more cities recognize the vital role of urban wetlands.

With the world’s urban population increasing by 2.4 per cent each year, and the number of mega-cities with more than ten million inhabitants set to jump from 31 to 41 by 2030, this growth spurt is an opportunity to integrate wetlands into urban planning and realise a range of benefits.



At the Nakivubo Swamps, adjacent to Uganda's capital city, Kampala, the local government had proposed draining the swamps to make way for agriculture. However, after a study revealed that this ecosystem was providing a valuable service by filtering organic waste and other effluent derived from Kampala, the proposal was dropped. The study indicated that a water-purification facility capable of performing the same service would cost several million dollars to construct and some \$2 million a year to maintain.

Creating wetlands can also be a beneficial strategy. Văcărești Nature Park, a 183-hectare urban wetland just 4km from the center of Romania's largest and most densely populated city, Bucharest, is a unique case of nature reclaiming a man-made reservoir abandoned since 1989. It is now a rich ecosystem with hundreds of species of flowers and plants around three ponds. Home to a vast range of bird and animal life including otters and turtles, the park provides a green lung to the built-up city surrounding the site.

The important role of wetlands is recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in Goal 6 on water, and Goal 14 on oceans and coasts, and Goal 15 on terrestrial biodiversity and ecosystems. Wetlands are also noted in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which recognizes that investing in wetlands and the ecosystem services they provide is a cost-effective way to reduce disaster and climate risks and build resilience to climate extremes. Yet wetlands are in serious decline worldwide.

Urbanization in all regions of the world presents unprecedented challenges and opportunities for humanity. We need cost effective ways to provide ecosystems services. Thus the need to safeguard and restore ecosystems, such as wetlands, is a vital strategy for a sustainable Earth. Governments need to ensure that the protection of wetlands is integrated into their decision-making, policies and future planning.

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