PRESS RELEASE

It’s a win for climate action as over 30 countries join the world’s largest freshwater restoration and protection initiative at COP28

The Challenge focuses on leveraging the support needed to conserve the intact freshwater ecosystems and bring 300,000 km of rivers and 350 million hectares of wetlands under restoration by the year 2030.

Lusaka Sunday 10th December 2023: Access to quality water is a human right, and accessibility of this essential natural resource is unquestionable for every deserving Zambian irrespective of one’s status. As a developing country access to clean and safe water plays a pivotal role in the attainment of key development indicators such as, socioeconomic growth, a thriving wildlife, quality education and public health services, and gender equity.

In the wake of climate change, water has been one of the most threatened natural resources, concerted efforts in mitigating the adverse effects of this catastrophic natural disaster is the best available option for every country, Zambia inclusive. Over the years' strategic initiatives have been launched at both local and global levels to foster nature based solutions, one such initiative is the Freshwater Challenge.

The Freshwater Challenge is the world’s largest initiative, and it aims to restore degraded rivers, lakes and wetlands to protect vital freshwater ecosystems. It is part of the Water Action Agenda. The Challenge focuses on leveraging the support needed to conserve the intact freshwater ecosystems and bring 300,000 km of rivers and 350 million hectares of wetlands under restoration by the year 2030.

Zambia is a champion country having been one of the first six countries in the world to jump on board and take up the challenge to push the global agenda on the local front to restore and protect wetlands, to ensure the initiative is an absolute success WWF Zambia has been a driving force by leading the way in identifying wetlands in urgent need for restoration and protection. The Kafue river, Magoye river and Lukanga swamps are the three wetlands shortlisted under the challenge for restoration and protection after discovering the adverse impact environmental risks have had on the three freshwater ecosystems.

On the global stage, the Freshwater Challenge continues to make a mark, the latest being at the ongoing COP28 in the United Arab Emirates where the Challenge has been chosen as one of the Water Outcomes of the event, further seeing an additional 15 countries declaring interest in joining the Challenge.

The new member countries are from Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America and were officially unveiled at a high level event with 15 Ministers hosted by the COP28 Presidency. They joined the six countries that launched the initiative at the UN 2023 Water Conference in New York - Colombia, DR Congo, Ecuador, Gabon, Mexico and Zambia.

The champions and new signatories - including Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Chad, Chile, Dominican Republic, Fiji, France, Finland, Germany, Iraq, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Peru, Republic of Congo, Senegal, Slovenia, Spain, Tajikistan, Tanzania, UAE, UK and USA - contain over 30 per cent of the world’s renewable freshwater resources and are home to over 1.5 billion people.

WWF Zambia Country Director Nachilala Nkombo said “Healthy freshwater ecosystems are critical to mitigating and adapting to climate change. They are seen as the foundation for a water resilient future. Connected floodplains and healthy wetlands can reduce the impact of extreme floods and build resilience to ever increasing droughts. Freshwater ecosystems must be maintained in pristine conditions at all times.”

Miss Nkombo said it is encouraging to see more countries coming onboard for a great cause, especially at a time as this when climate change effects are more aggressive than ever before, placing a desperate call for collaborative effort.
The Freshwater Challenge provide an opportunity for member countries to collaborate and develop nature based solutions to address the risks wetlands face globally. Along with accelerating climate action, restoring and protecting healthy freshwater ecosystems will also boost water, food and energy security, enhance peace and stability, reverse nature loss and drive sustainable development.

**Benetria Milambo**  
WWF Zambia Communications Coordinator  
Tel: +260772099733  
Email: bmilambo@wwfzam.org

**About World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)**  
The World-wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is the world's leading independent conservation organization with a global network in over 100 countries. Our mission is to stop the degradation of the planet’s natural environment and to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature. We have been working in Zambia since 1962 organizing our efforts across Freshwater, Wildlife, Forests and People.