



The spotlight this year on transboundary water management to celebrate the World Water Day (22 March) sums up the need for countries to speed up the mechanisms to manage shared water resources. For Green Cross International, which was launched in the same year as when the first World Water Day was celebrated in 1993, an immediate priority is for countries to ratify the United Nations Watercourses Convention.

Since 21 May 1997 when the United Nations adopted the UN Watercourses Convention, it has still not entered into force as it needs another 19 countries to ratify it. Only 16 countries have ratified so far, with France having just announced its intention to do so.

"Such lack of political will to give teeth to this Convention will only make it more difficult to deal with emerging water shortages throughout the world." said Alexander Likhotal, President of Green Cross International. "As climate change further exacerbates the water crisis, the difficulties and cost of expanding and sustaining water security will rise, and potentially very steeply. The risks from failing to act are increasingly understood to be high, and include economic instability, loss of quality of life and reversal of gains in poverty reduction, more frequent disaster and ecological degradation. Therefore, we are calling for a swift ratification of the Convention."

The world's 263 transboundary lake and river basins include the territory of 145 countries and cover nearly half of the Earth's land surface. Great reservoirs of freshwater also move silently below national borders in underground aquifers. Over half the world's population live in valleys drained by transboundary rivers.

Over the last 60 years there have been more than 200 international water agreements, showing the potential of water as a natural resource to bring people together rather than being a source

of discord. However, there have been 37 cases of reported violence between states over water and tensions over sharing of water are growing as demand rises while supply decreases. Fuelling the crises are increasing water pollution and huge losses through inefficient distribution.

Whether it is a major river in like the Nile or Okavango in Africa, the Mekong in Asia, Danube in Europe, La Plata in Latin America or Jordan in the Middle East, the implementation of the UN Watercourses Convention holds the potential of smoothening out existing tensions as well as the possibility of minimising many future conflicts worldwide.

"The Green Cross network, from the outset, has been involved in areas of tensions and conflicts over water," said David Alix, Director of the Green Cross International's Water Programme. "We were among the prime movers to get this UN Watercourses Convention into place and are actively involved in trying to get it ratified. States have to realize that managing water across boundaries is crucial to achieve global water security and peace."

At the Istanbul World Water Forum, Green Cross International and WWF plan to recognise and "reward" States that have already ratified the Convention, urging those remaining to do so. The two organisations will be keynote speakers at another specific event on "Sustainable and Equitable Cooperation: Institutional tools and mechanisms."

The shortage of water for domestic, commercial and agricultural use is having an untold effect on the health and development of communities across the developing world. It is hardly surprising that tensions - that could degenerate into violent conflicts - arise over this scarce and precious resource. The GCI Water for Peace programme aims to promote cooperation and conflict resolution throughout the world's transboundary river basins. This effort is illustrated by GCI's current effort to promote sound decisions to manage the shared water resources in Israel and Palestine, or in Uruguay and Argentina where GCI is involved in resolving a conflict over paper mills. In 2006, Green Cross International's global work on water attracted the prestigious UN award of "Champion of the Earth" for its founding President Mikhail Gorbachev.



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For more information on GCI water projects:

[Water Politics Needs a Sea Change](#)

www.greencrossinternational.net/water

www.greencrossinternational.net/convention

Further information:

[World Water Forum 5 website](#)

[World Water Day website](#)