



**STATEMENT BY ELIZABETH MARUMA MREMA
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

on the occasion of

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"Valuing water"

Water is everything to us – it is our origin and our future. From the vast oceans to the water vapour in our atmosphere, water unites all of nature and its processes. Water is one of our planet's most valuable resources for its direct necessity for people and for the proper functioning of ecosystems.

And yet, despite it being one of our defining natural resources, we continue to put pressure on our global supply of usable, clean and drinkable water through growing populations, demands from agriculture and industry and the impacts of climate change. One fifth of the world's river basins are experiencing rapid changes in the area covered by surface waters and the impacts of climate change make rainfall and freshwater reserves more unpredictable.

Our ability to benefit from water resources relies on healthy ecosystems. Healthy marine, coastal and freshwater ecosystems underpin the delivery of water supplies, water quality and guard against water-related hazards and disasters. Freshwater ecosystems are important for the recycling, filtration and moderation of potable and usable water.

Restoring and maintaining healthy freshwater ecosystems are imperative for provisioning the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation which is essential to the realisation of all human rights. This right entitles everyone to have access to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water. However, in 2017, nearly 30 per cent of the world's population lacked safely managed drinking water services and more than 50 per cent lacked safely managed sanitation services.

The fifth *Global Biodiversity Outlook* outlines several sustainable transitions geared towards reversing biodiversity loss and its impacts on ecosystems. The sustainable freshwater transition promotes an integrated approach to guarantee the flow of water for nature and people, by improving water quality, protecting critical habitats, controlling invasive species, and safeguarding connectivity between habitats.

Water and sanitation also remain critical to containing the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the value of sustainably managing water resources and protecting the ecosystems that provide this precious resource. Integrated water resource management approaches are needed to reinforce the value of water and rethink our relationship between water, people and health. These approaches must also aim to involve more diverse stakeholder groups and transition to multi-value water governance, as women and girls are often disproportionately impacted by inadequate water and sanitation conditions.

Although it may seem infinite to some, water is a finite resource. However, its scarcity is not the only factor that adds value to water. Water means different things to different people because of its intrinsic, traditional, cultural and social values. To acknowledge the true value of water we must protect and conserve our healthy marine, coastal and freshwater ecosystems to ensure water for all.

