



Statement by Elizabeth Maruma Mrema
Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity
on the occasion of
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“Groundwater – Making the Invisible Visible”

Our first instinct is usually not to protect what we cannot see. Yet the groundwater that lies beneath our feet is vitally important for our health, security and livelihoods.

In some regions, groundwater is scarce and difficult to access. Elsewhere, it is plentiful, providing seemingly endless sources of water. This inequity has been the source of many conflicts throughout history, highlighting the importance of protecting and conserving these ecosystems.

Groundwater recharges underground aquifers that supplies access to safe water for drinking and sanitation and provides water for our agricultural systems. Groundwater comprises a large portion of our freshwater supply, but these freshwater ecosystems are increasingly under threat from over-extraction and pollution.

Over the last 100 years, increased demand for food caused by population growth, urbanization and dietary change has resulted in an eight-fold increase of water use for human needs.

The extraction of groundwater by pumping it to the surface, dries out aquifers and can lead to catastrophic impacts, including sinkholes, landslides and coastal saltwater intrusion into lakes and reservoirs. Groundwater depletion leads to ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, threatening lives and livelihoods. Groundwater’s ability to provide safe drinking water and sanitation can also be threatened by pollution from waste and agricultural runoff.

Thus, it is imperative that our societies, economies and industries transition adopt more integrated approaches that recognize the importance of freshwater biodiversity and groundwater ecosystems.

The conservation, restoration and sustainable use of freshwater biodiversity, including groundwater, not only contributes to water security and access to safe drinking water and sanitation, but can help address many sustainable development issues, such as food security, land degradation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and disaster risk reduction.

But addressing the geographic inequities involved in global use and accessibility to groundwater requires enhanced ambition. The importance of groundwater for water and sanitation, agriculture, industry,



biodiversity and sustainable development needs to be better reflected in national policies and international agreements and frameworks.

The post-2020 global biodiversity framework, to be adopted later this year, will be an important contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This represents a critically important opportunity to highlight and amplify the role of groundwater and freshwater ecosystems and ensure a future that lives in harmony with nature.
