WWF urges the CZECH REPUBLIC to


- Support the ratification and future implementation of the UN Watercourses Convention, especially through its EU Presidency in 2009; and

- Include the convention in the agenda of the appropriate Council meeting, in order to ensure its *swift ratification by all European Union Member States* and to discuss a *mandate for the European Commission to take the lead* in the ratification process.

The UN General Assembly adopted the UN Watercourses Convention in 1997 by an overwhelming majority. The Czech Republic was among the more than 100 nations that *voted for its adoption*, but has never initiated the process for becoming a party.

Since its adoption, the UN Watercourses Convention has been overshadowed by debates over the *Kyoto Protocol* and the *World Summit on Sustainable Development*.

Now, in the United Nations “Decade for Action: Water for Life,” and ahead of the 2009 World Water Day, with focus on transboundary waters, the *time is right to push for the entry into force of the convention*, as a necessary global framework to govern transboundary water cooperation.

The UN Watercourses Convention *requires states to cooperate* on the equitable and reasonable use and management of international watercourses, with a view to attaining their sustainable utilization, thereby enabling the achievement of meaningful, long-lasting, and large-scale conservation and development goals.

The entry into force of the convention would improve interstate coordination and offer a *stronger enabling environment* for the European Union and partner countries to implement and monitor water and development cooperation policies.

The entry into force of the convention would improve interstate coordination and offer a *stronger enabling environment* for the European Union and partner countries to discuss, implement and monitor measures for climate change adaptation in international rivers.

A former recipient of foreign aid, the Czech Republic now has the status of a donor nation. By underpinning interstate cooperation at the basin level, the convention’s entry into force and widespread implementation will *support Czech development assistance* and advance one of the country’s foreign policy top priorities: the *achievement of the MDGs*.

*For further information, please visit [www.panda.org/freshwater/unconventions](http://www.panda.org/freshwater/unconventions), or contact Flavia Loures, at [flavia.loures@wwfus.org](mailto:flavia.loures@wwfus.org) or +1(202)640-9055.*
Czech Development Cooperation

In 1996, the Czech Republic was one of the first post-Soviet nations to reintroduce an official development cooperation policy. Now, the country has the opportunity to show its leadership once more in a matter of crucial importance for sustainable development: the sound, peaceful and cooperative management of international watercourses, based on well-established rules, principles, and procedures of international law. The topic of “transboundary water management” is at the heart of the principal goals of Czech foreign aid, such as poverty reduction, sustainable development, human rights, good governance, the introduction of legal principles, and migration management.

Notwithstanding, none of the Czech Republic’s eight priority countries for bilateral development cooperation has become parties to the UN Watercourses Convention. The Czech Republic could assist those countries through the process of ratification and future implementation (e.g., by providing resources for the necessary studies and stakeholder meetings). The Czech Republic could also lead by example by joining the convention and widely promoting its entry into force.

In Africa, for example, where most international watercourses still lack adequate legal protection, the UN Watercourses Convention could serve as a common governance framework enabling the integrated and coordinated management and use of the continent’s shared river basins. Moreover, the convention would add value to existing watercourse agreements.

This relates directly to the Czech Republic’s stated interest in the solution of security and sustainability issues in Africa. In that regard, the Czech government has already recognized the need to strengthen the country’s engagement in the promotion of good governance and pay particular attention to strategic areas, such as access to energy and water. The Czech Republic also encourages more support to infrastructure development (The Czech Republic and Africa, 2007). The convention’s entry into force would advance all of those interrelated foreign policy goals.

For example, climate change could increase the potential for interstate disputes over scarce water resources to turn into violent conflict, creating another major obstacle to sustainable development. With its provisions on dispute prevention and peaceful settlement, on emergencies and harmful conditions, on environmental protection and vital human needs, the convention is more important now than ever to help remove the causes of instability, foster cooperative adaptation strategies, and facilitate disaster prevention and mitigation in transboundary waters. For infrastructure development, in particular, it is crucial that countries agree on clear rules governing the implementation of planned measures with potential transboundary effects, such as those contained in the convention.

The Regional Perspective

Many EU Member States participated actively in the drafting of the UN Watercourses Convention, highlighting the value of codifying and developing the law on the non-navigational uses of international watercourses as a mechanism for promoting cooperation and preventing conflict. Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom sponsored the convention. Only Finland, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden are parties to it. Luxembourg is a signatory, but has not yet become a contracting state. No EU country voted against the convention and only three abstained.
While there are no disadvantages for EU countries becoming party to the convention, such countries would benefit from its entry into force and implementation:

- It would be relatively straightforward for EU countries to become parties to the UN Convention. The UN Watercourses Convention is in harmony with the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (UNECE Water Convention). As a global instrument, the UN Watercourses Convention’s provisions are more general and flexible than the more detailed requirements under the ECE Convention and the WFD, which most EU Member States have already adopted and transposed into national legislation.

- EU Member States have accumulated valuable lessons from years of implementing the ECE Convention and EU Water Law and Policy. The UN Watercourses Convention could serve as an effective, common platform by which EU countries would share such tremendous wealth of knowledge and experience with other regions of the world where freshwater agreements or joint water institutions are weak or non-existent.

- The UN Watercourses Convention conforms with and would advance goals and targets under EU guidelines and recommendations on WATER AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION POLICIES. As a member states, the Czech Republic takes into account such international commitments when planning and implementing its development cooperation:

  a) The EU 1998 Guidelines on Water Resources Development Cooperation, which make express reference to the UN Convention as a key framework for transboundary IRBM.

  b) The EU 2002 Communication on Water Management in Developing Countries, which identifies transboundary water development cooperation as a priority area. The UN Convention is the only United Nations global policy instrument guiding cooperation among watercourse states.

  c) Once in force, the UN Convention could serve as a legal and policy framework to support and coordinate the implementation and monitoring of the EU Water Initiative in a transboundary context.

  d) According to the Compendium of Actions of the UN Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, the entry into force and implementation of the UN Watercourses Convention will contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, which are in the core of the European Consensus. The UN Watercourses Convention requires interstate cooperation and offers policy and legal guidance for states to engage in transboundary integrated river basin management.

**WWF urges the Czech Republic, as an EU member state and a key international donor for the MDGs, to approve the UN Watercourses Convention and deposit an instrument of accession with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.**