



## MINISTRY OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENT

### STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENT, ON THE EVE OF WORLD WETLANDS DAY

1<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY 2023

Fellow citizens and friends,

Tomorrow, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2023, Uganda joins the rest of the global community to celebrate World Wetlands Day and the 52<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Ramsar Convention on the protection of wetlands. Presently there are 172 Contracting Parties and 2,455 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance, covering a total surface area of over 255 million hectares. Uganda as a contracting party has so far designated 12 Ramsar sites.

Each year, World Wetlands Day is celebrated under a particular theme. This year's event, will be commemorated under the global theme "It's time for Wetland restoration", and our national theme is '*Wetland restoration for people and nature*' with 'Restore wetlands, save life' as the slogan. This theme is in line with the UN decade on ecosystem restoration and brings out the critical pathway for wetlands restoration with emphasis on the linkages and interdependence of people on wetlands, highlighting also their significant contribution to their existence and the need to use them wisely.

The day gives us an opportunity to take stock of our actions and commitment to undertake measures to reverse impacts of our negative

actions. At the same time, it provides the opportunity to raise awareness on the importance of wetlands for our common future.

### **Uganda's Wetlands Coverage**

Wetlands in Uganda registered a decline in coverage from 15.6% in 1994 to 13% in 2015. Only 8.9% of the 13% was intact and over 4.1% degraded. Government put in place several efforts to ensure that the 4.1% is restored. I am happy to note that because of these vigorous efforts, we are beginning to see a positive trend with the intact wetland coverage now at 9.3%.

### **Fellow country men and women**

Government has continued to put the wetland agenda at the forefront. In 2011, there was Cabinet decision to create Environment Protection Police Unit and in 2014 another Cabinet Decision to cancel titles erroneously issued in wetlands. Another decision was made to halt any further issuance of permits in wetlands. On several occasions HE the President has called upon all concerned citizens to stop further encroachment and asked for punishment of the culprits. Several other efforts such as wetland restoration programs, demarcation of wetland boundaries, development of management plans for wetlands, massive



public awareness among others have contributed to some of the positives we are registering to-date.

We must congratulate ourselves for the mileage reached so far, however we need to double our efforts because of the rampant degradation still taking place especially in urban areas.

### **Fellow Citizens**

I challenge you to be part of the fight against impunity and continued encroachment, because the cost of inaction will not spare anyone. It is time to fast-track restoration of wetlands because of the benefits we stand to lose if we do not do anything.

### **Dear Ugandans**

There are seven main benefits of restoration namely; increasing the biological diversity (40% of the world's biodiversity live in wetlands), replenishing and supplying water, carbon storage a very critical role in light of climate change, flood and storm water control – look at the flooding in Kampala whenever we have rains, improved livelihood when the habitat for them to thrive is protected and restored, ecotourism and wellbeing are a few of the benefits.

Finally dear citizens of Uganda each of you is key to maintaining wetlands in a healthy state; report encroachment and carry the message that we can maximise the benefits of healthy wetlands within our immediate reach at the least cost possible.

I wish to invite every Ugandan and all our partners to commemorate the World wetlands day and to inform you that the venue for the national celebrations will be at **Gweri sub county Headquarter Grounds** in Soroti District Local Government starting at 9.00 a.m. I also urge all the other districts to organize similar events to commemorate this important day as we share the message for wetland restoration.

I wish you all wonderful celebrations

**FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY**



Hon. Beatrice Atim Anywar Odwong  
**MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENT**