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## **World Wetlands Day 2018**

Remarks by

**Ms. Rosa Malango**

**UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR | UNDP RESIDENT  
REPRESENTATIVE**

**ARUA HILL GROUND, ARUA MUNICIPALITY, ARUA DISTRICT | 2. FEB. 2018**

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The Honourable Minister, Ministry of Water and Environment,  
Members of the Parliamentary Committee on Climate Change,  
Members of Parliament from West Nile present,  
The Local Council Five Chairperson, Arua District,  
The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Water and Environment,  
The Executive Director, National Environment Management Authority,  
Conservationists and Environment activists,  
Local leaders, invited guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am pleased to join today, in this beautiful town of Arua, as we commemorate the World Wetlands Day 2018.

This day celebrates the adoption of **the Convention on Wetlands** in 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar and also offers us an opportunity to reflect on the state of wetlands in Uganda.

This year's global theme: '**Wetlands for Sustainable Urban Future**' together with the national theme; '**Urban wetlands, prized land, not wasteland**', shine a bright light on the state of wetlands in towns and cities.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As cities expand and demand for land increases, the tendency is to encroach on wetlands: They are degraded, filled and built upon. In Kampala for example, urbanisation, industrialisation, search for land for settlement and farming by the urban poor, has led to increased degradation of wetlands.

This, I understand is a re-occurring pattern in various urban centres in the country including Arua contributing to Uganda's reduced wetland area from 15.6% in 1994 to 10.9% in 2017.

This is a worrying trend especially in this era of climate change where extreme weather events such as storms, floods and delayed rainy seasons are on the increase. Leading to prolonged dry spells, drought, hunger and even death in some instances.

Due to these, the protection and restoration of wetlands has become more important than ever to protect the population from extreme weather events through their natural ability to absorb and store water from excess rainfall, releasing it in the dry seasons.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As we celebrate World Wetlands day, I call on urban planners and decision-makers to integrate urban wetlands into cities' and townships sustainable future planning and development.

I am glad to hear that the leadership of Arua district is taking the lead in this and has issued a by law calling on sub county local councils and lower local chairpersons to ensure strict observation and protection of wetlands in their areas of jurisdiction.

This is very progressive legislation. However, just like with some national laws on environment conservation, there seems to be challenges in enforcement. It has been reported that out of Arua's 22 designated wetlands, 19 are heavily encroached on for settlement and farming.

These numbers are worrying and need to be addressed sooner than later to avoid the harsh impacts of climate change such as prolonged dry seasons that I know are already being felt here in Arua.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The West Nile region is also hosting one of Africa's biggest refugee populations. Local governments need address wetland degradation issues not only in the host

communities but also in the refugee settlements which require water and farm land to grow their own food.

I thank the people of this region for the kindness they have shown their brothers and sisters from across the border in South Sudan. The United Nations remains committed to working with all the local leaders and communities to address all these issues and achieve sustainable development.

Our support has already led to;

- **The development of the National Wetlands Atlas** together with the Ministry of Water and Environment, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The Atlas shows the location of wetlands, the extent of degradation and makes recommendations on their restoration.
- In addition, UNDP together with the Government have kicked started an eight year **Green Climate Fund project** to restore wetlands and build resilience of the communities surrounding them. This project is in response to the President's call to restore the Country's wetlands.
- **UNDP has also partnered with local communities to strengthen the management of Ramsar sites** such as the Makanaga wetland in Wakiso district. This Ramsar site is part of the Mabamba wetland system which through the UNDP small grants programme received funds to establish boat and bird watching trails for both local and foreign tourists. Providing alternative sources of livelihoods for the community hence protecting the wetland.

- **Promoted restoration of wetland protected areas in refugees settlements such as Lake Nakivale in Western Uganda.** Working with the local government in Isingiro, UNDP supported refugees and their host communities to restore the banks of Lake Nakivale through tree-planting to minimise silting and improve on the quality of water as well as the fisheries.

These efforts can be replicated here too and the UN remains committed to working with both the central and local governments to push such initiatives in both the host and refugee areas.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to thank the Government of Uganda and the Ministry of Water and Environment for their efforts to protect and create awareness around wetlands.

I also thank the organisers of today's national commemorations which have provided a platform for us to share and learn from each other. Let us take all the messages and lessons shared today, practise them and become ambassadors for wetlands.

Together we can achieve Sustainable Development Goal 13 on climate action as well as the aspirations of Vision 2040 by protecting our wetlands - for us and our children.

I thank you all for listening. Happy Wetlands day.