



Statement by Martha Rojas Urrego, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, on the occasion of World Wetlands Day 2018.

Wetlands are essential for a sustainable urban future

4 billion people, about half of the world's population live in urban areas today. By 2050 that number is expected to increase as more people move into cities in search of jobs and better opportunities.

Urbanization is one of the key defining mega-trends of our time. It's completely transforming where and how people will live in the future. In fact it is estimated that the number of mega-cities with more than ten million inhabitants will jump from 31 to 41 by 2030.

A rapidly growing urban population comes with enormous challenges for city planners and managers. They have to ensure that cities today can deliver not only basic services such as accommodation, transport and water, but that these cities are safe, resilient and environmentally friendly.

Every year on 2 February, we celebrate World Wetlands Day, to raise global awareness about the important role of wetlands for people and the planet. This year's theme "Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future," highlights the important role of wetlands for sustainable urbanization. Urban wetlands are essential and contribute to making cities liveable.

During storms, urban wetlands absorb excess rainfall, which reduces flooding in cities and prevents disasters and their subsequent costs. The abundant vegetation found in urban wetlands, acts as a filter for domestic and industrial waste and this contributes to improving water quality.

Urban wetlands supply cities with water and are green spaces for recreation which helps to promote human wellbeing.

Today's current development of human settlements is a major concern for wetland conservation and wise use. As cities grow and demand for land increases, the tendency is to encroach on wetlands. They are often viewed as wasteland available to dump waste or be converted for other purposes.

Yet when preserved and sustainably used, urban wetlands can provide cities with multiple economic, social and cultural benefits. They are prize land not wasteland and therefore should be integrated into the development and management plans of cities.

We encourage cities to adopt policies and actions which will help to conserve urban wetlands. There are already successful examples of cities that have committed to sustainably use their wetlands.

In October 2018 in Dubai, during the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, we will be recognizing the first cities to obtain Wetland City Accreditation under our Convention.

We hope that these pioneer cities will serve as a catalyst and inspire deliberate actions that set us on a pathway towards sustainable urbanization.

Let us commit to making our cities liveable by taking actions today to retain, restore and preserve urban wetlands.

Happy World Wetlands Day 2018!