



## Extended 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the World Heritage Committee

### Oral statement on Rivers and Increasing Dam Damage (Item 7, Closing of the Item)

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Thank you for allowing us to speak, Mr. Chairman!

We value development of “no go” policies, but feel extreme underappreciated urgency for protection of freshwater ecosystems.

Rivers occupy just 1% of terrestrial Earth surface, but natural and cultural systems of remaining 99% heavily depend on healthy freshwater bodies and their ecosystem services.

Due to increasing societal demands for scarce river resources, freshwater biodiversity is much more endangered than that in marine or terrestrial realm, 87% of monitored freshwater species populations are in decline, and two thirds of sizeable rivers are already fragmented by dams.

In 2019 we delivered to you the “Heritage Dammed” Report, demonstrating that only a handful of World Heritage properties offer reliable protection for rivers, while hundreds of other sites are not capable to safeguard rivers running through them<sup>2</sup>. By 2019, up to a quarter of natural properties were degraded or threatened by water infrastructure.

Despite decisions to prevent such damage made by the Committee, by now this share has increased to almost 29%. Today we see 80 properties threatened or already degraded by hydro-engineering projects, with shining examples of Rufiji (in Selous), Pashur (in Sundarbans) and Mekong (in Luang Prabang) rivers during this session. In many cases such as Vat Phou (in Laos), Burkhan Khaldun (in Mongolia) or Chitwan (in Nepal) the State of Conservation Reports do not mention potential threats from upstream or downstream dams, thus failing to preemptively resolve future problems.

In our Report we presented recommendations how to improve recognition and proactive protection of freshwater ecosystems to ensure that the World Heritage convention does not fail on rivers. We beg you to consider this subject as extreme priority before it is too late.

Thank You, Mr. Chairman.

<sup>2</sup> Heritage Dammed. Water Infrastructure Impacts on World Heritage Sites and Free Flowing Rivers. <http://www.transrivers.org/pdf/2019HeritageDammedFinal.pdf>