Springs under threat: mobilising urgent action for neglected freshwater systems

CONSIDERING that springs are in themselves, and due to the hydrogeological processes that they generate, of great geological interest and can be located in areas with a rich geological heritage;

CONSIDERING that springs by linking groundwater to surface water might be a source of biodiversity between these ecosystems

CONSIDERING that natural springs are the biotopes with the richest biodiversity in terrestrial ecosystems, each of them being home to several hundred species in a surface area of only a few square metres, and are therefore particularly critical points or 'super hotspots';

CONSIDERING that in many places of the world, springs hold significant importance in the context of cultural, spiritual or religious beliefs.

HIGHLIGHTING the fact that due to their unique characteristics, springs contain species/strains of potentially high biotechnological value

HIGHLIGHTING the fact that they are rich in exclusive taxa (crenobionts), and constitute the only refuge for numerous rare and endangered species, and for the most sensitive species, especially in the more developed regions of the planet;

MINDFUL of the fact that research carried out in different parts of the world has revealed that each small-spring stronghold is the result of a long evolution in isolated conditions and, because of this, constitutes a unique biological cosmos, which is unique and different from any others;

AWARE that they probably constitute one of the rarest, most fragile habitats, threatened by the effects of climate change and the overexploitation of water resources;

WARNING that there are reports of the accelerated loss of springs, and even the disappearance of entire spring systems on a territorial level;

FURTHER WARNING that this scenario may be hiding a silent but massive biological extinction; and

HIGHLIGHTING the fact that springs are one of the least explored and most neglected habitats, and that *de facto*– or for reasons of scale – they were not protected throughout the region by the European Union's Habitats Directive or Water Framework Directive;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, UAE:

1. URGES the Commissions to raise greater awareness regarding the importance of conserving spring ecosystems, promoting projects that allow for progress to be made in their conservation;

2. ENCOURAGES State Members from all of IUCN's Statutory Regions, as well as their regional governments, to adopt effective conservation measures for spring biodiversity, its geodiversity and geological heritage;

3. URGES State Members to include spring habitat conservation as a priority in the Union's policies and strategies that focus on the conservation of biological and geological diversity, and to recognise:

a. spring habitats as a key biotope for preserving aquatic biodiversity, including them as priority habitats of community interest; and

b. natural springs as an "ecosystem dependent" on groundwater bodies, and encourage their monitoring and management; and

4. REQUESTS the IUCN Director General to:

1) Establish a cross Commission Task Force on the Protection of Springs and Pools across the Commissions, including the SSC, WCPA, and CEM

2) Ensure that Springs and Pools are included in the water stewardship elements of the IUCN's Nature 2030 Strategic Plan; and

5. REQUESTS the SSC and CEM members to contribute to the monitoring of biodiversity of Springs and Pools, and their restoration and recovery; and

6. URGES States and government agencies to:

1) Include conservation and management of Springs and Pools in national policy goals such as NBSAPs, NDCs, NAPs, National Ramsar Strategy and Action Plans, and National Implementation Plan for the SDGs.

2) Ensure increased representation of Springs and Pools in Protected and Conserved Areas (GBF Target 3).

3) Create a UNESCO designation of sacred springs as cultural and spiritual reserves.

4) Call for proper restoration of Springs and Pools in restoration programmes (Target 2 and the IUCN supported Freshwater Challenge), removal of invasive non-native species.