016 Springs under threat: mobilising urgent action for neglected freshwater systems

CONSIDERING that springs, because of their hydrogeological processes, are of significant geological interest and are often located in areas with rich geological heritage;

CONSIDERING ALSO that springs link groundwater to surface water, acting as vital connectors between these ecosystems and supporting unique biodiversity;

CONSIDERING FURTHER that natural springs are among the richest terrestrial biotopes, often hosting hundreds of species within a few square metres, making them ‘super biodiversity hotspots’;

CONSIDERING MOREOVER that springs hold significant environmental, cultural, spiritual and religious importance in many places of the world, including to Indigenous Peoples' and local communities;

HIGHLIGHTING that springs contain species of potentially high biotechnological value, due to their unique characteristics;

[HIGHLIGHTING that springs are rich in endemic taxa (crenobionts) and constitute the only refuge for rare, endangered, highly sensitive and ancient species, preserved through isolation, particularly in more developed regions;]

[MINDFUL that research shows that each small spring stronghold results from long-term isolated evolution, and constitutes a unique biological cosmos;]

AWARE that springs are among the rarest and most fragile habitats, threatened by climate change, groundwater pollution and overexploitation of water resources;

CONCERNED at the accelerated loss of springs and the disappearance of entire springs on a territorial level;

FURTHER CONCERNED that this trend may conceal a silent but extensive biological extinction;

[HIGHLIGHTING that springs are among the least explored and most neglected habitats, that de facto, or for reasons of scale, they are not protected throughout the world;]

RECOGNISING that much of the biota in spring habitats remains undiscovered;

MINDFUL of the identification crisis, where experts familiar with spring biodiversity are few and declining in number; and

FURTHER HIGHLIGHTING the urgent need to build capacity within the scientific and conservation community to ensure conservation efforts are science-based and effective;

WHEREAS springs are, in themselves, sites of geological interest that generate rocks that preserve the geological history of the Earth and of life, and in particular, of climate change. Some are the result of exceptional geological processes, such as thermal or saltwater springs, which are of great scientific, educational, and tourist interest.

WHEREAS springs have always been used, being one of the best examples of traditional uses and knowledge of geodiversity (ancient spas, mills, inland salt mines, etc.), which urgently need to be preserved and valued so that the memory of Indigenous peoples and local communities is not lost; and

AWARE of the identification crisis, which is resulting in fewer and fewer specialists familiar with the biodiversity and geodiversity of springs.

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:

1. REQUESTS the Director General to integrate springs into the water stewardship elements of IUCN's Nature 2030 draft Programme (2026–2029);

2. REQUESTS the Commissions to establish an inter-Commission Task Force on the protection of springs, including the Species Survival Commission (SSC), the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and the Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM);

3. REQUESTS SSC and CEM members to contribute to monitoring, restoration, recovery and Red List status assessment of the biodiversity of springs;

4. URGES the IUCN Commissions to raise greater awareness, strengthen capacity, and promote efforts that conserve and advance the protection of biodiversity of springs;

5. ENCOURAGES State Members and their regional governments to adopt effective measures to conserve spring biodiversity, geodiversity and geological heritage;

6. URGES State Members to prioritise spring conservation in the Union's policies and strategies on biological and geological diversity, and to recognise:

a. springs as key biotopes for aquatic biodiversity and prioritise them as habitats of community interest; and

b. natural springs as groundwater-dependent ecosystems, and encourage their monitoring and management and recovery; and

c) springs as sites of geological interest and as sites of traditional uses and knowledge of geodiversity.

7. URGES States and government agencies to:

a. include conservation objectives for springs and pools in national policies or strategies;

b. increase identification of springs and pools as Key Biodiversity Areas and their inclusion in Protected and Conserved Areas (Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Target 3);

c. promote and share best practices for spring restoration in support of Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Target 2;

d) Include springs in local and national inventories of sites of geological interest and traditional uses and knowledge of geodiversity;

e) Support spring specialists and their scientific and technical work; and

f) Sustainable development of springs for scientific, educational, and/or tourism purposes in order to raise awareness about their conservation.

8. ENCOURAGES States and government agencies to explore the potential to nominate sacred springs as UNESCO World heritage sites, noting that Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) remains the criterion for inscription on the World Heritage List.