



**Declaration Statement by Hon. Dr. Deo-Guide Rurema,
Minister of Environment, Agriculture and Livestock for Burundi,
and Chairman of the Nile Council of Ministers**

**Official launch of
2019 - The Year of the Nile Basin
Putting Water at the Heart of Regional Transformation**

Today January 27, 2019 is an important day for the Nile Basin countries as I, on behalf of my colleagues Ministers in charge of Water Affairs in the Nile Basin Initiative Member States, formally launch 2019 as **‘The Year of the Nile Basin.’**

This Year will consist of a series of events of global relevance, given the significance of the River Nile for its citizens, the region and the world. The Nile is the world’s longest river, starting its journey of 6,695 kilometers from Burundi in Rutovu, which is the most distant source to Egypt and into the Mediterranean Sea. The Nile Basin is home and a source of livelihoods to around 257 million people.

As it twists and turns its way across 10 countries, the Nile takes on different local names – for example Kagera, White Nile, Tekezze, In spite of this however, the River Nile is one great system that knows no borders.

As we speak, the Nile Basin region is undergoing rapid social, political, economic and environmental transformations. The Basin is facing a multitude of shared challenges which, like the Nile itself, span across borders. Challenges include growing demands for water, but as food and energy, which are also dependent on water. However, water variability keeps increasing, and climate change is expected to increase the risks. This reality can no longer be ignored.”

The shared waters of the Nile Basin are at the center of these changes - they are both a cause and consequence of these changes – but are ultimately part of the potential solutions.

The River Nile plays an integral part in achieving not only water security but also food and energy security as well as in eradicating poverty for the people of the Nile Basin region. The Nile waters are key to achieving the regional development agenda and enabling regional integration.

We are pleased that the Government of Burundi is on the right track in protecting this common heritage:

The decree prohibiting the use of plastic bags is being implemented, this will help ensure quality water and reduce microplastics in lakes and rivers and which will protect the biodiversity of these ecosystems.

The Government of Burundi has approved the ordinance prohibiting planting of tree species that use a lot of water in marshes and water sources to preserve water.

In the National Development Plan 2018-2027, the Government put forward a programme “Ewe Burundi Urambye” meaning “Oh Burundi you are covered (in green)”, which consists of reforestation at the national level.

Over the last 20 years, the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), has been and is the only basin-wide institution including ALL the Nile Basin countries. The NBI, established in February 22, 1999, has helped to nurture the culture of water cooperation in the Nile Basin, providing a neutral platform for countries to discuss how to jointly take care of and utilise the shared water resources for the benefit of all and to address the common challenges which no country can tackle alone.

‘The Year of the Nile Basin’ under the motto: **‘Putting Water at the Heart of Regional Transformation’**, is dedicated to highlight the role that transboundary water must play in the conversations Nile Basin countries have about the present and future regional development. The emphasis is on ensuring equitable utilisation and win-win benefits for society and the environment alike. Ultimately, it will also contribute to maintain regional peace and security.

The government of Burundi, in partnership with the Nile Basin Initiative, is organising different activities as part of the launch. These include a press briefing tomorrow Tuesday, January 29, 2019 in the morning. This will be followed by tree planting at Rutovu.

Following the launch and throughout the year 2019, the Nile Basin Initiative and Member States will play host to key events. These include:

- The 20th anniversary of the Nile Basin Initiative and annual Regional Nile Day celebrations on February 22, 2019 in Rwanda
- Launch of the 20th anniversary publication on February 22, 2019
- Screening of a brand-new dedicated documentary on February 22, 2019
- Launch of the State of River Nile Basin Report 2018

- A session during World Water Week in August 2019 in Stockholm, Sweden

Let me conclude by once again emphasizing the importance of **'The Year of the Nile Basin'**. I call upon all governments at every level, civil society, the private sector and billions of ordinary men, women and children in the Nile Basin region, as well as friends of the Nile, to work together and to commit ourselves to putting water at the heart of regional transformation.

I am convinced that by doing so, we can give our grandchildren and future generations here in the Nile Basin region, the ability to continue to benefit from our shared River Nile.

I now declare 2019 as The Year of the Nile Basin.

Long live cooperation on the Nile!