



## Water Museums Connect People and Water across Borders and Conflicts

### Press release

#### **5<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Global Network of Water Museums : 'Cities of Water. Peace and Prosperity through Water Sustainability Education'.**

Date: 12-10-2024

Place: Porto, Portugal

As a shared resource for humanity, water is a force for peace and prosperity. In these times of turmoil with conflicts, floods and droughts, water museums around the globe reconnect people with water to enrich their lives. After a three-day conference in Portugal, the Global Network of Water Museums (WAMU-NET) concluded that, **in societies where rivers and water play a central role in their culture, cooperation improves the conditions of the rivers as well as the well-being and livelihoods of people and, in doing so, reduces conflict and is a force for peace.**

As a flagship initiative of UNESCO-IHP, WAMU-NET and its members engage with people of all ages and emphasize the significance of protecting and restoring water resources like rivers, lakes and wetlands. During their 5th International Conference in Porto, Portugal (9-11 October 2024), 32 water museums from 24 different countries joined to discuss "Peace and Prosperity through Water Sustainability Education". Participants from countries such as Iraq, Iran, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Senegal could only participate online because of political turmoil in their regions and difficulties in obtaining VISA according to new restrictions of the Schengen treaty.

Today, water demands special attention as it transcends both national and cultural boundaries. The water challenges that water museums and society are facing imply that our often human-centered society must be balanced with a more nature-centered one. Development, nature and culture should go hand in hand to promote cooperation in the field of water and improve the well-being and livelihoods of all people.

In order to promote the need for greater cooperation in the field of culture and education on more sustainable uses of water, 18 cooperation agreements between

different water museums were signed in Porto. Among them, a historic cooperation agreement was made between Ghajn Interpretative Centre, Malta, and the Albear Aqueduct Museum, La Habana, Cuba. The agreement was signed by representatives of the national agencies that manage these museums: The Energy and Water Agency (Malta) and the Instituto Nacional de Recuses Hidraulicos (Cuba). Also worth mentioning is the agreement signed between the UNESCO-ICQHS Centre in Yazd (Iran) on the qanats and the 'Lapis' Water Museum in Naples, which houses one of the most important aqueducts of ancient Greece, built 2000 years ago, some 40 metres below the level of today's city.

'AQUAPLAY', a new educational tool based on innovative digital technologies, was launched during the conference. This free digital tool enables children to learn about water challenges in a playful way by coloring artworks online. WAMU-NET Secretariat also announced the creation of a new online platform dedicated to water sustainability education, titled 'Water Cloud: Resources for Inclusive Sustainable Futures'. The reconstruction sponsored by WAMU-NET of the traditional hydraulic mill destroyed by the earthquake in Azzadan (High Atlas, Morocco) is another concrete example of how cooperation lies at the root of the successful implementation of the SDGs.

Not only the mediating role of water in conflicts but also the need to improve the mapping of our precious hydraulic heritage has been at the center of discussions. At present, many freshwater resources and related heritages (both tangible and intangible) are destroyed, overexploited or neglected. As we no longer place water at the center of our life, mapping water heritages is crucial for fostering a new water culture and advocating for its ecological and cultural significance.

The next conference of WAMU-NET is expected to be hosted at the International Water Memorial (MINA), under construction in Brasilia, Brazil.

More than 100 water museums affiliated to WAMU-NET in more than 40 countries contribute daily to better management of water. Through its members, Museums champion the importance of water through exhibitions, educational activities, knowledge sharing, and innovative digital initiatives.