



**Remarks for Prof. Martiale Zebaze Kana on behalf of Ms. Nisha
UNESCO Regional Director and Representative for Southern Africa**

**High-level meeting on the impacts of Uranium mining in the
Stampriet Transboundary Aquifer System**

17 June 2024

Mariental Area

[Protocol]

- i. Hon Minister Calle Schlettwein, Ministry of Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform (MAWLR)
- ii. Hon Minister Tom Alweendo, Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME)
- iii. Hon Minister Pohamba Shifeta, Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT)
- iv. Hon Governor Salomon April, Hardap Region
- v. Hon Governor Pijoo Nganate, Omaheke Region
- vi. Hon Councillors
- vii. MS N Nghituwamata, Executive Director, Ministry of Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform (MAWLR)
- viii. Executive Director, Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME)
- ix. Executive Director, Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT)
- x. Executive Secretary, ORASECOM

Distinguished participants;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

All protocols observed.

1. On behalf of UNESCO Regional Director and Representative for Southern Africa, *Ms Nisha*, it is my honor to address you today at this pivotal meeting.

We gather here today to address a matter of utmost importance - ***the sustainable management and protection of the Stampriet Transboundary Aquifer System (STAS)***. I would like to express our appreciation to the Government of Namibia for inviting UNESCO to provide technical assistance in this field. This is why UNESCO is supporting the government with an expert technical advisory from renowned independent International in-situ Leaching Experts from Australia and the US.

2. This meeting comes at a time when in recent years, most countries in Southern Africa including Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa have experienced an increase in natural disasters such as droughts and floods that compromise water and food security. With the number of catastrophic events predicted to grow by 40% between 2015 and 2030, it is expected that more pressure will be applied to the current water resources, which will be affected both in terms of quantity (during droughts) and quality (during floods).
3. The Stampriet Transboundary Aquifer System, a lifeline for the arid regions of Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa, is threatened by potential pollution. Our collective responsibility therefore is to ensure that this vital water resource continues to sustain the communities and ecosystems that depend on it.
4. UNESCO's commitment to sustainable management and protection of the Transboundary Aquifer System is unwavering. Our past endeavors in the region, from 2013 to 2022, have been directed towards supporting this cause. Today, we reaffirm this commitment and pledge our continued technical support to the governments of Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa.

Hon Ministers, Distinguished Guests

5. Access to enough water of good quality and the preservation of water resources are core challenges for our societies, requiring new ways of using and managing this precious resource. That is why, every year, we produce the World Water Development Report, a report coordinated by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water to give visibility to this important issue.
6. On this occasion, UNESCO wishes to recall the importance of dialogue and cooperation in the field of water, whether surface or groundwater. International cooperation is not only desirable, but essential, when over 40% of the world's population lives in transboundary river basins, which account for almost 60% of the world's freshwater resources.
7. At UNESCO, we have long been convinced of the value of this cooperative approach, whether through our Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP), which over five decades has gradually brought together over 3000 experts including 169 National Committees, 29 independent UNESCO water centres, and 84 UNESCO university Chairs on water, to list just a few.
8. IHP has been at the forefront of global efforts to ensure water security. Through scientific research, capacity-building, and policy advice, IHP has been instrumental in promoting sustainable water resource management and addressing water-related challenges worldwide.
9. To encourage international cooperation in the field of water, UNESCO has launched several initiatives. In the Stampriet Aquifer, we have set up a joint-management framework, involving Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa. In the same vein, UNESCO mobilises resources to bring together experts, around this great cause of water. UNESCO also provides technical support to its Member States to ensure the quality of freshwater resources.
10. Today's workshop is an opportunity to exchange information on the issues faced during the sustainable development of transboundary water resources. This will require partnerships and cooperation agreements at all levels, as water is an essential resource that provides a foundation to

all developmental efforts and that faces serious risks – including inadequate protection and sometimes irreversible pollution.

- 11.To further enrich our discussions and provide diverse perspectives, we have invited independent technical and renowned experts from Australia and the United States. Their experiences and expertise will undoubtedly contribute to our discussions today and contribute to the collective understanding of the challenges and potential solutions.

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- 12.As we embark on these discussions, let us remember that our actions today will shape the future of the communities that rely on the STAS. Let us strive for solutions that not only address the immediate challenges but also ensure the long-term sustainability of this crucial water resource.

13. Before I conclude, let me reassure the Government of Namibia that UNESCO and the UN in Namibia remain committed to supporting you and the neighboring states in the management of transboundary basins and aquifers, to encourage cooperation between countries that share aquifers, lakes, and river basins by creating spaces for exchange and joint decisions in order to ensure an equitable and sustainable use of water resources.

- 14.Let us work towards our goal of increasing water security by strengthening water sciences for informed policymaking.

I look forward to productive discussions and fruitful outcomes.

Thank you.

Prof. Martial ZEBBZE KANA

Head of Science, UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa