

# Media Update

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## UNEP

### PRESS RELEASE

## Initiative to restore more than 30 per cent of Pakistan's Indus River Basin by 2030 named one of seven UN World Restoration Flagships

**Nairobi, 13 February 2024** – Efforts by local communities and civil society groups to protect and restore Pakistan's Indus Basin, which has been rapidly degrading, are gaining momentum through the Government of Pakistan's [Living Indus](#) initiative.

Boosting biodiversity, climate mitigation and community resilience through nature-based solutions, these efforts were today named as one of seven UN [World Restoration Flagships](#).

The World Restoration Flagship awards are part of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration – led by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) – which aims to prevent, halt, and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean. The awards track notable initiatives following global commitments to restore one billion hectares – an area larger than China.

“The Living Indus initiative presents a unique opportunity to enhance the resilience of the Indus ecosystem in the face of climate change,” said Ahmad Irfan Aslam, Pakistan's Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination. “This holistic strategy employs community-led, gender-responsive, and transparent nature-based solutions for restoring the entire Indus Basin, safeguarding its resources for the people of Pakistan.”

The Basin is also home to 195 mammal species, at least 668 bird species, and over 150 fish species, including 22 endemic ones and the

endangered Indus Blind Dolphin, one of the world's rarest mammals.

In recent years, Pakistan has experienced some of its most catastrophic [floods](#) and [extreme heat](#) waves on record, as well as spiralling [air pollution](#) levels, all of which are exacerbated by climate change and severely affect the lives and livelihoods of millions.

“Pakistan’s climate induced disasters in recent years have been heart-breaking, causing destruction on a scale that no nation can, or should have to, accept,” said Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP. “It is therefore important to recognize and support projects like the Living Indus initiative for the hope and resilience it can offer Pakistan and the region.”

The Living Indus initiative advances the sustainable management of the Indus River Basin, seeking to balance water resource use, ecosystem preservation, and socio- economic development.

By promoting responsible water management, reducing pollution, preserving biodiversity, and enhancing community engagement, it helps ensure a climate resilient future for Pakistan.

The basin-wide initiative has already restored 1,350,000 hectares. It encompasses 25 projects, and it is estimated to cost up to USD 17 billion. With its recognition as a World Restoration Flagship, the Living Indus initiative will now be eligible for additional technical and financial UN support, bolstering its plans to restore 25 million hectares of the river basin by 2030 (encompassing more than 30 per cent of Pakistan’s area).

“Pakistan and its people have been living off the Indus Basin for 6,000 years. Today, 95 per cent of the population, all the country’s agriculture and most of its industries depend on it,” said Julien Harneis, the former UN Resident Coordinator in Pakistan. “However, it suffers not only from the impact of climate change, but also from human-induced environmental degradation. The Living Indus Initiative brings together the government, civil society, the UN and all the countries that support Pakistan to protect the Indus’ future.”

As a World Restoration Flagship, the Living Indus Initiative is recognized as one of the best examples of large-scale and long-term ecosystem restoration in any country or region, embodying [the 10 Restoration Principles](#) of the [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#). The

announcement of seven new World Restoration Flagships was made ahead of the 6<sup>th</sup> UN Environment Assembly ([UNEA-6](#)), held between February 26 and March 1, 2024. The Assembly will convene the world's Environment Ministers in Nairobi, Kenya to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

**Photos and footage:** You can use stills and videos from this [database](#), please credit photographers and organizations accordingly.

### About the partner organizations:

#### About the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

The UN General Assembly has declared 2021–2030 a [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#). Led by the UN Environment Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, together with the support of partners, it is designed to prevent, halt, and reverse the loss and degradation of ecosystems worldwide. It aims at reviving billions of hectares, covering terrestrial as well as aquatic ecosystems. A global call to action, the UN Decade draws together political support, scientific research, and financial muscle to massively scale up restoration.

#### About the UN World Restoration Flagships

Countries have already promised to restore [1 billion hectares – an area larger than China](#) – as part of their commitments to the [Paris climate agreement](#), the [Aichi targets](#) for biodiversity, the [Land Degradation Neutrality](#) targets and the [Bonn Challenge](#). However, little is known about the progress or quality of this restoration. With the World Restoration Flagships, the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration is honouring the best examples of large-scale and long-term ecosystem restoration in any country or region, embodying the 10 Restoration Principles of the UN Decade. Progress of all World Restoration Flagships will be transparently monitored through the Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring, the UN Decade's platform for keeping track of global restoration efforts.

#### About the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

[UNEP](#) is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by

inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

### **About the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**

[FAO](#) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Its goal is to achieve food security for all and make sure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active healthy lives. With over 194-Member Nations, FAO works in over 130 countries worldwide.

The FAO is actively involved in assisting The Government of Pakistan in both adapting to and mitigating climate change. Through a variety of projects and resources, FAO aids in the creation of climate-adaptive strategies, establishes data systems to facilitate well-informed decision-making, and reinforces the management of water and land resources at different administrative levels.

FAO plays a key role in supporting the 'Living Indus' initiative, working closely with the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, the Government of Pakistan and other UN agencies. FAO is committed to rallying all relevant stakeholders, fostering a collaborative relationship aimed at achieving climate resilience in the Indus Basin for 80 per cent of Pakistan's population.

### **Pakistan's Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination**

The Ministry plays a pivotal role in addressing the most pressing global challenges of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. Established to tackle environmental issues and promote sustainable practices, the Ministry has been at the forefront of policy formulation and implementation. Through international collaborations and domestic efforts, the Ministry of Climate Change Pakistan continues to contribute to a greener and more resilient future for the country.

### **United Nations Resident Coordinators Office in Pakistan**

The UN Resident Coordinator's Office is a one stop shop for all UN support in Pakistan and outside. It encompasses all organizations of the UN system dealing with operational activities for development, regardless of their formal presence in the country. The RC system aims to bring together the different UN agencies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of operational activities at the country level.

In the wake of the catastrophic floods in 2022, the Resident Coordinators

Office was able to convene all relevant stakeholders, leading to the conceptualization of the Living Indus Initiative and the putting together of a 'living list' of 25 interventions that work to repair and restore the ecosystem and build a climate resilient Pakistan.

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