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**Regional Nile Day 2014**

**Press Statement by Hon. Betty Bigombe**

**Minister of State for Water**

**Ministry of Water and Environment**

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**Uganda Media Center, Kampala - Uganda**

Nile Day is an annual event that commemorates the establishment of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) on 22nd February 1999, by Ministers in charge of Water Affairs in the Nile Basin countries.

The Day has been celebrated since 2007 at regional level and in each of the 10 NBI Member States namely Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, The Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda). Nile Day provides an opportunity for riparian citizens to focus attention on and advocate for the importance of Nile cooperation in the management and development of the common Nile Basin water and related resources. Uganda is hosting this year’s Regional Nile Day celebrations on 21st February, 2014 (a day earlier) at the Sheraton Kampala Hotel, Lion Gardens.

Nile Day 2014 is dedicated to the theme **‘Water and Energy: National Challenges, Trans-boundary Solutions’.** The main objective of the 2014 edition is to bring to the attention of NBI stakeholders, riparian citizens and the general public, the inter-linkages and interdependencies of water and energy in light of the challenges faced due to a growing population and rapid economic growth as indicated in the recent growing GDP trends for each of the 11 Nile Basin countries (Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, The Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda).

Water is needed for energy generation and transmission, particularly for hydroelectric, nuclear, and thermal energy sources. Energy is needed to produce, transport, treat and distribute water. The more energy we need, the more water we use and vice versa.

Today, each Nile riparian country has ambitious national development plans to fuel economic growth and promote poverty alleviation efforts; undoubtedly all the plans depend on energy availability. Hydro-power is the preferred source of energy in all the riparian countries for various reasons, key among them is the low production cost of electricity from hydropower options, which makes power affordable to the urban and rural poor. Indeed with its characteristic landscape, the Nile Basin offers huge potential for hydroelectric power generation, which largely remains untapped.

However if each Nile Riparian State was to pursue and implement its national hydropower infrastructure development plans on the River Nile without consideration of the larger river basin context, there is a risk that some of the national hydropower investments could be sub-optimal (seen regionally) and may foreclose future development opportunities.

Trans-boundary cooperation in power infrastructure development would provide significant reduction in project financing; promote regional power trade and markets and improve power reliability and affordability.

The Nile Basin Initiative is leading efforts to transform the region’s power sector in various ways: it provides a forum for joint planning and cooperative development of hydropower generation and transmission options as well as power trade among the Nile Basin countries. This it does through strengthening trans-boundary planning, coordinating the construction of the regional transmission grid and encouraging further integration of the regulatory and supervisory framework.

One example is the Regional Transmission Interconnection Project which will facilitate power trade among five NBI Member States namely Burundi, DR Congo, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. This project currently under implementation will construct an estimated 1,500 km of transmission lines and associated sub-stations at a total cost of USD 403 million. The Uganda component whose total investment is US$ 72.83 million involves:

• Bujagali – Tororo transmission line, double circuit, 127.7 km 220 kv line.

• Mbarara – Mirama transmission 220 kv line, double circuit, 66km.

• Extension of transformer substations at Tororo and Bujagali.

• Construction of transformer substation at Mirama.

Preparation of other interconnectors between Uganda (Nkenda) and DR Congo (Beni); Kenya and Tanzania; Iringa and Mbeya; and Tanzania and Zambia are at advanced stage with most of the studies completed and resource mobilization on-going.

Besides the power interconnection projects mentioned above, other power investment projects include the soon to be implemented USD 470 million Regional Rusumo Falls Hydro-electric project which will generate 80MW to benefit Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania and the recently commissioned Ethiopia-Sudan interconnection which has made power trade and the creation of synergy between the power utilities of Ethiopia and Sudan possible.

In addition to transforming the region’s power sector, NBI has prepared and facilitated other investment projects in Agriculture and Regional Trade as well as River Basin Management and Development. The Eastern Nile Watershed Management project jointly implemented by Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan is one such project. In total, the investment projects are worth over US$ 1 billion.

Furthermore, NBI has launched, deepened and advanced an on-going dialogue; providing **the first and only all-inclusive platform** for riparian countries to discuss with trust and confidence, the joint management and development of the common Nile Basin water and related resources. As a result, the Nile Basin is witnessing observable improvement in both the extent and quality of cooperation among Member States and there is recognition of the benefits beyond water such as climate change adaptation, bigger regional markets and cross border trade, as well as enhanced regional peace, security and political stability.

NBI has also created a **strong technical foundation,** developed necessary **policy instruments** for water resources management and development, as well as **a comprehensive knowledge base** on the water and related resources of the Nile and tools to enable countries to understand the implications of their actions on neighbors and opportunities for managing risks and as well as realizing tangible benefits and joint opportunities.

All the above clearly demonstrate that riparian countries believe the cooperative approach remains the only choice to addressing the region’s trans-boundary water resources management and development challenges on the one hand, and that NBI provides the most viable platform for cooperation on the other.

As we observe the 8th Regional Nile Day this Friday 21st February, we will take advantage of the day to celebrate our collective achievements as NBI Member States and to reaffirm the importance of trans-boundary water cooperation in addressing national energy challenges.

**I thank you for your attention**