



Chapala, March 23, 2010

## **Petition of the International Living Lakes Network for Lake Chapala**

Since 2001, Lake Chapala has been represented in the International Living Lakes Network by the organizations of Amigos del Lago de Chapala and the Fundación Cuenca-Lerma-Chapala-Santiago (Friends of Lake Chapala and the Lerma-Chapala-Santiago Watershed Foundation).

Since that time, a number of studies, proposals, programs, and agreements to rescue Lake Chapala—the biggest lake in México—have been realised.

Lake Chapala is one of the most studied lakes in Latin America. The responsible authorities are already aware of the problems; they know in detail the problems with the water levels and the pollution sources throughout the Lerma-Chapala watershed. They have known for a long time that the high levels of pollution provoke not only the destruction of a unique ecosystem with great cultural value, but they also represent tremendous risks for human health.

**As a conclusion of the 13th International Living Lakes Conference held at Lake Chapala in March 2010, the delegates of all the Living Lakes worldwide, as well as other conference participants, request that:**

- Lake Chapala reached a reasonable water level of more than 60% of its capacity. We know that this recent recovery has been the result of heavy rainfalls. Action on the part of the authorities has been rare, and the commitment to fully recover the lake's natural volume has not been fulfilled. A review of the distribution agreement for surface waters in the Lerma-Chapala watershed is needed, along with the launch of concrete actions on the part of the National Water Commission and other state and municipal authorities.



- The introduction of a law regarding overall management of Lake Chapala by the President of the Republic is of great importance to create a strong legal foundation.
- We ask the Mexican government to act immediately to improve water quality throughout the watershed, now that industrial, agricultural, and urban pollutants are found in these bodies of water, many with levels outside the international standards.
- We request an examination of international industries that pollute the Lerma River, the Santiago River, and the Lake Chapala, to help their home governments to take action to protect the natural resources as, in many countries, these actions are crimes.
- Likewise, the Mexican government needs to examine national businesses and strictly apply laws which they are violating.
- The case of Santiago River in Juanacatlán and El Salto is one of the most serious problems not only in the Lerma-Chapala-Santiago basin and Mexico; it is one of the most polluted rivers in the world. The members of Global Nature Fund and the international Living Lakes partners were shocked that such a level of government negligence exists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Contracted agreements, commitments and actions must be respected (e.g., those related to Lake Chapala's designation as a Ramsar Site). According to international agreements of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, the requirement of a management plan must be fulfilled. After the United Kingdom, Mexico ranks second worldwide with 127 Ramsar sites. Being declared a Ramsar Site is not the important thing; the point is to implement programmes to protect the site. Further, we seek a draft law from the federal executive level to develop and carry out Lake Chapala's Ramsar management plan.
- Promote ethnic heritages sites within the Lake Chapala watershed, to maintain the region's culture and traditions.
- Keep the endemic flora of the Lake Chapala watershed and avoid the invasion of introduced species.



- Maintain and promote the activity of fishing cooperatives. Concrete measures should be taken to prevent the introduction of species from the upper basin and lake that affect the four species endemic to the lake: the charal, whitefish, carp and catfish.
- Provide a tourism development plan for the Chapala basin, based on specific and measurable ecological and social objectives. Conduct regular monitoring of progress and the impact of tourism development in the basin. We request the implementation of the agreement declaring the Lake Chapala basin as a “Priority Zone for Eco- and Social Tourism.”
- Citizen participation in environment activities, so far, is not sufficient. Authorities at the state and federal levels need to establish appropriate structures and processes to ensure continuous and active citizen participation at all levels: in planning, implementation and monitoring of plans and in implementing programmes for regional development of the basin.
- Effective participation is possible only if citizens are well informed and aware. That is why environmental education plays an essential role. We ask the authorities at all levels to support and promote the environmental education activities of NGOs in the basin.

