

### Four African countries sign new Nile treaty

by Ben Simon

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ENTEBBE, Uganda (AFP) – Four African countries on Friday signed a new treaty on the equitable sharing of the Nile waters despite strong opposition from Egypt and Sudan who have the lion's share of the river waters.

Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania signed the new framework while Kenya issued a support statement, an AFP correspondent reported. Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo were not represented at the meeting in the Ugandan town of Entebbe.

"This agreement benefits all of us and harms none of us," Ethiopia's Water Resources Minister Asfaw Dingamo said. "I strongly believe all Nile Basin countries will sign the agreement." The upstream countries want to be able to implement irrigation and hydropower projects in consultation with Egypt and Sudan, but without Egypt being able to exercise the veto power it was given by a 1929 colonial-era treaty with Britain. "We regret the intentional and announced absence of our dear brothers from Egypt and Sudan," said Stanislas Kamanzi, Rwanda's water and lands minister.

Kenya's ambassador to Uganda, Geoffrey Okanga, said his country's water minister "signalled to me her readiness to sign this agreement as soon as possible because the Kenyan position on this matter has not changed..."

The new agreement, the Nile Basin Cooperative Framework, is to replace a 1959 accord between Egypt and Sudan that gives them control of more than 90 percent of the water flow. The two countries have expressed fears that their water supply would be severely reduced if the seven other Nile users divert the river with domestic irrigation and hydropower projects.

The 6,700-kilometre Nile is a confluence of the White Nile, whose source is Lake Victoria in east Africa, and the Blue Nile that springs from the Ethiopian highlands. The two Niles join in the Sudanese capital Khartoum and flow down through Egypt into the Mediterranean Sea in a huge delta. The Nile Basin Initiative, which had been spearheading the talks, will now become the Nile Basin Commission and will receive, review and approve or reject projects related to Africa's

longest river. It will be based in Addis Ababa and have representation from all nine Nile basin countries.

Egypt's State Minister for Legal Affairs Mufid Shehab said the new agreement was a mistake. "We do not want to view it as a destructive act, but we view it as a mistaken action and we should stop it," state media quoted Shehab as saying late Thursday. "We never hoped this would happen because it completely goes beyond the framework of cooperation."

Also Thursday, a senior EU envoy urged seven east African countries not to sign the new deal and to settle differences with Egypt and Sudan first. Marc Franco, who heads the European Union delegation in Egypt, said a separate deal would "make the political problems that exist worse."

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit warned at the weekend that Cairo's water rights were a "red line" and threatened legal action if a partial deal is reached.

Source: [Yahoo! AFP](#) .