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Immediate Past Co-Chair of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative, Mayor Constant, to represent the Mississippi River at the International Meeting of the Great Rivers of the World in Rome

Mississippi River Mayor commits Corridor to International cooperation

ROME, Italy, October 23, 2017 – Mayor Belinda Constant of Gretna, Louisiana, joined the Mayor of Rome and leaders representing ten of the world's most important rivers across five continents today representing the Mississippi River. The Italian Ministry for Environment, Land and Sea hosted the International Meeting of the Great Rivers of the World in partnership with UNECE, the International Network of Basin Organizations, and Aquamadre.

Colin Wellenkamp, Executive Director of the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI), along with MRCTI Immediate Past Co-Chair Mayor Constant, represented the Mississippi River at the Summit. The Summit convenes just six weeks after the MRCTI Annual Conference where 30 mayors from along the Mississippi River gathered to discuss strategies for disaster mitigation and announced a new partnership with the CDP North America – formerly Carbon Disclosure Project.

During her speech in Rome, Mayor Constant reflected on the importance of the Mississippi River to the global food supply: “For us on the Mississippi River, we are blessed with the most agriculturally productive zone on Earth. More than 35 percent of the world’s traditional cropland is located within major river basins producing the vast majority of the world’s food supply and the Mississippi ranks #1 in this production.”

Mayor Constant stated that, “The great rivers of the world face an urgent problem – sustaining the Earth’s fresh water supply and majority of the world’s food production in the face of unprecedented climate impacts.”

Mayor Constant introduced the Meeting delegates to MRCTI’s International Food and Water Security Agreement brokered in Paris in 2015 to mitigate climate impacts on commodity production the world over.

The event was designed as a milestone in preparation for the twenty-third Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and of the eighth World Water Forum, which takes place November 10 in Bonn, Germany.

The Summit was a call to action for great river basin organizations, local, national and regional administrations to take more overt action toward funneling finances into river sustainability work. Mayor Constant implored delegates of the financial industry to develop a finance tool to support sustainability work in the world’s major food-producing river basins, “We propose that part of the COP 23 agenda during Water Action Day on November 10 be about creating a dedicated investment mechanism to sustain our food-producing river basins.”

“This is the first time the Mississippi River has been represented at this annual gathering of the world’s great rivers, which is shocking to us since the Mississippi Basin produces the most food commodities on earth,” claimed Executive Director of MRCTI, Colin Wellenkamp.

The Mississippi River economy generates nearly \$500 billion annually and its natural infrastructure plays a critical role in cleaning and moving water. The natural infrastructure of the Mississippi River Delta alone provides \$12 to \$47 billion in benefits to the economy annually. “This gathering of representatives of some of the most important water sources of world could not come at a more critical time. Our future economies rely on our ability act swiftly in addressing the increasing threat of climate change and its harmful impact on our water system” Mayor Constant said to the assembly. Since 2005, the River Valley has sustained above \$200 billion actual losses from natural disasters.

Mayor Constant concluded her speech by addressing the overlaying question in the room – how does the U.S. engage at these multi-lateral levels in the ‘America First’ era? “America first does not have to mean America alone.” My fellow mayors and I, on one of the world’s most important rivers, stand united and we stand with all of you to pursue solutions to the dramatic climate challenges we are facing together. Count us in, call on the Mississippi River Basin. Wherever our rivers are not linked by geography, they are linked by us and our rivers will comprise a quarter of global GDP. If we stand together and save our rivers, we will save ourselves, stated Mayor Constant.

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The Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative is comprised of 75 mayors and the association represents cities on the main stem Mississippi from Minnesota to Louisiana. More information can be found on our website at www.MRCTI.org