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Statement

by

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at the

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address you today on the occasion of the special session on water and disasters. I thank the organizers for the invitation.

Recent months have once again shown that most disasters and climate change impacts are felt through the water cycle, causing human casualties and huge economic losses. This is a call for action to work on disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and water management in an integrated way.

Yet it's not only a matter of working across sectors - but also across borders. More than 60 per cent of global freshwater flow occurs in transboundary basins. More than 40 per cent of the world's population lives in basins that cross national boundaries. Transboundary water cooperation is therefore essential for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. It helps prevent conflicts and tensions over unilateral adaptation measures. It also makes disaster risk reduction more effective: by enabling the sharing of data, thus reducing uncertainty; by enlarging the planning space; by locating measures where they have the optimum effect and even potentially by sharing costs and benefits. For example, Finland and the Russian Federation

have agreed to manage floods jointly: Finland can release additional water in periods of floods and then compensate the Russian Federation for the loss of hydropower potential.

Joint disaster risk reduction is common priority which can initiate or broaden transboundary cooperation. It can contribute to regional integration, peace and prevention of conflicts. An example is the Neman basin in Eastern Europe, where a joint climate change adaptation project between Belarus and Lithuania implemented by ECE has promoted transboundary cooperation more broadly. Also, in many other shared basins, flood risk reduction is an incentive and topic of cooperation.

Global legal and intergovernmental frameworks can prevent conflicts over dwindling water resources and address disasters by providing the “rules of the game for cooperation”. They also offer forums for exchange of experience, guidance development, policy advice and support on the ground.

The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (also known as the Water Convention), entered into force in 1996 and is serviced by ECE. It includes many provisions relevant for transboundary disaster risk

reduction, such as joint early warning for floods. The Water Convention aims to protect and ensure the quantity, quality and sustainable use of transboundary water resources by facilitating and promoting cooperation.

Since its adoption, more than 25 years ago, the Convention has helped countries address floods, jointly adapt to climate change in shared basins and reduce disaster risks. It offers different kind of tools and support.

First of all, it offers a unique intergovernmental framework to foster exchanges and mutual learning. The Convention's Task Force on Water and Climate, co-chaired by the Netherlands and Switzerland, has promoted efforts and built capacity to increase resilience in transboundary basins. This is coupled with regular trainings and global workshops on different technical and policy aspects related to water and disasters.

Second, the Convention has developed many policy and guidance documents which distill best practice and can guide countries' efforts. One example is the Guidance on water and adaptation to climate change, developed and adopted in 2009. The most recent is the Words into Action - Implementation Guide for Addressing Water-

Related Disasters and Transboundary Cooperation. This was prepared together with UNISDR as an official guide for implementation of the Sendai framework with regards to water.

Third, the Convention has increased adaptive capacity in a number of transboundary basins around the world, by helping develop a joint adaptation strategy and implement concrete measures. This proves the merit of using and restoring ecosystems for adaptation and disaster risk reduction. For example, in the Dniester basin, shared between Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, implemented adaptation measures included ecosystem restoration, installation of monitoring stations, creation of an information exchange system and youth involvement. In the Chu Talas basin in Central Asia, a transboundary climate change impact and vulnerability assessment was prepared, a dedicated working group on climate change was created under the Chu Talas Commission, and trees were planted to reduce flood risks.

Fourth, the Convention supports global processes on climate and disasters. The need for transboundary and regional cooperation in adaptation is now increasingly recognized in the discussions under UNFCCC and UNISDR. The Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction includes a call for transboundary and regional cooperation in disaster risk reduction as a key element. And the need for

transboundary cooperation in adaptation is a main message in the new UN-Water policy brief on water and climate. Considering that UN-Water is the UN-wide coordination mechanism on water, this recognition represents the joint view of 30 UN agencies and more than 30 partners on this topic.

Despite all the progress, countries and particularly basins face significant challenges in mobilizing financing for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. This is even more difficult in transboundary basins, since basin organizations often cannot access financing directly. Therefore, since 2017, the Convention has been supporting basins and basin organizations in developing bankable projects for climate change in transboundary basins, for example through trainings and a publication with the World Bank and African Development Bank.

Legal frameworks are more effective if backed and supported by a larger group of countries. The Water Convention became a global framework in 2016. All United Nations Member States can now accede to it. Chad and Senegal became Parties in 2018 and more than 20 other countries, mostly from Africa, have started the accession process. In addition, more than 120 countries worldwide participate in its activities and meetings. The Secretary-General is encouraging

countries to accede to the Convention and asking the United Nations system to support accession and implementation. I hope many more countries will join soon, and I invite you to a side event on the Convention tomorrow at 1.15 p.m. in room 6.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires us to break silos between sectors. We need to bring together the communities of water, climate change and disasters, but also energy and agriculture -- major water users. At the global level, upcoming events such as the Climate Action Summit in September and the World Water Day in 2020, focused on water and climate, provide concrete opportunities for mainstreaming transboundary and regional cooperation in adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies. And at the national level, these considerations can be included in the Nationally Determined Contributions to be revised in 2020, and in national and local disaster risk reduction strategies.

Let us all work together for a sustainable management of our most precious resource.

Thank you.
