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Statement

by

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at the

**Side-Event: Transboundary Water Cooperation for Sustainable Development - The
Role of the Water Convention?**

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a real honour for me to be here today and discuss with you the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, also known as the Water Convention, which is serviced by ECE.

The looming water crisis is one of the greatest challenges facing humanity. Growing water overuse and water pollution, water related disasters and climate change impacts threaten our development, health and safety, and that of the many ecosystems we depend upon.

The majority of waters are shared by two or more countries, creating strong interdependencies. Moreover, the impacts of water challenges are often felt beyond the basins, through trade or migration or ocean pollution. Thus, no country can solve these problems alone. Cooperation is a prerequisite. This is why we need common rules. This is why we need multilateral frameworks. And that's what the Water Convention offers.

The Convention is based on the main principles of international

customary law. It requires its Parties to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impacts, to use shared waters in an equitable and reasonable way, and to cooperate on the basis of agreements and joint institutions.

As transboundary water cooperation is dependent on national water governance, the Water Convention includes provisions for national implementation. These promote integrated water resources management, the prevention and control of pollution, and the introduction of good water management practices. These are “due diligence” provisions. Thus, their level of implementation is proportionate to national capacity. This makes the Convention a flexible instrument which can be implemented in countries with different levels of economic development and hydrological situations.

The Convention recognizes that each transboundary basin has its own specific challenges and characteristics. It therefore requires riparian Parties to develop specific agreements, and establish joint institutions to manage their shared waters. At the same time, it defines key basic obligations that underpin sound cooperation: exchange of information, development of joint objectives, and mutual assistance in case of emergency situations. It is through these agreements at the level of the shared rivers, lakes or aquifers that the Convention is

implemented.

The Water Convention is not only a set of rules. It is also a developed institutional framework of political and technical intergovernmental bodies. This allows for the development of common policy responses to emerging challenges. It offers a platform to strengthen political will towards cooperation. And it helps monitor and foster continuous progress.

The Convention has a large set of activities to build capacity, foster the development of agreements and sustainable management of shared waters.

It's thanks to this combination of a sound set of rules, the intergovernmental platform and the many activities that the Convention supports the establishment and strengthening of cooperation.

But how does it work in practice? What have been the Convention's impacts so far?

After more than 20 years of implementation in the pan-European region, the positive impacts of the Convention are evident.

In the early '90s, when the Convention was negotiated, only a few transboundary basins in the ECE region had agreements regulating joint management. Now, “only” twenty-three years after its entry into force, we have the opposite situation: now, only a few basins do NOT have a cooperative framework. The Convention has dramatically driven cooperation. And we should not forget that this happened in a period of difficult economic and political transitions.

With water cooperation have come many benefits. Improved water conditions have positively impacted human health and well-being. Flood management has improved, thereby reducing casualties and economic losses. Predictability has increased, making investments more secure and enhancing economic integration. In some cases, this has even created a common identity in our region - the Danube is a good example.

Even before being opened for accession beyond the ECE region, the Convention had a global influence. The water charters of the Niger Basin and of the Lake Chad, as well as the water directive of the Economic Community of West African States, are inspired by the Water Convention.

It is therefore not surprising that the Convention generated a very strong interest after opening for accession to all UN Member States in 2016. In 2018, Chad and Senegal acceded. About 20 more countries are now in the process of accession. Most interestingly, more than 120 countries are already involved in the Convention's activities, benefitting from its many capacity building activities and using its tools.

This offers great opportunities to accelerate efforts towards transboundary water cooperation worldwide. And this acceleration is badly needed. ECE and UNESCO are co-custodians of SDG indicator 6.5.2. Last year they released the first report on the status of transboundary water cooperation, based on this indicator. It shows that globally, the average percentage of national transboundary basin area covered by an operational arrangements is only 59 per cent. Only 17 out of 153 countries reported operational cooperation on all their transboundary basins. We have a long way to go to achieve SDG 6 and its target 6.5, calling for transboundary water cooperation to be established in all transboundary basins.

It is therefore extremely positive that Parties are strongly supporting the universalization of the Water Convention and

promoting accession to it. Today's event is a great example. But many more efforts are being done. The Russian Federation has promoted the Convention in the BRICS framework. Last year, the EU organized a demarche promoting accession in more than 70 countries worldwide and reconfirmed its commitment to promote the Convention at the highest level, through the Council conclusions on water diplomacy. The newest Parties, Chad and Senegal, are effectively promoting accession of their co-riparians in the Lake Chad, Niger, Senegal and Gambia river basins and more broadly across Africa.

The UN system is uniting forces around the Water Convention too. The Secretary-General is calling all countries to accede to it. At the same time, he has requested all UN agencies and departments to support accession and implementation. Even international financing institutions such as the African Development Bank foster accession to the Convention. And river basin commissions, such as the Volta Basin Authority or the Niger Basin authority, encourage their members to become Parties to the Convention.

Together, countries, the UN system, International Financial Institutions and other actors, we can achieve our common vision of

sustainable management of shared resources, and foster regional development and stability.

However, to attain high objectives, we cannot forget the resources needed to achieve them. With the Convention's opening, the Water Convention's secretariat receives a growing number of requests for policy advice, normative support, capacity building, and direct technical assistance, from countries and organizations from all over the World. At its 8th session in October 2018, the Meeting of the Parties recognized that future programmes of work of the Convention would require additional regular budget resources in light of the global opening. It therefore "requested the secretariat to take all necessary measures, including the provision of additional human and financial resources from the regular budget, to ensure the effective management and full implementation of the programme of work". The 68th session of the Economic Commission for Europe took decision K(68) on the matter and transmitted it, along with a draft resolution on the topic, to the Economic and Social Council for consideration and possible adoption. This issue will soon be discussed at ECOSOC.

I therefore very much hope that all countries which have been,

and will continue benefitting from the Convention, be they Parties, countries in the process of accession, or countries which are not there yet but recognize the usefulness of the Convention's framework and activities, will strongly support this request.

In closing, I thank the organisers of this important side event, the governments of Chad, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Senegal and Switzerland, for their commitment to the topic of cooperation and their continued support to the Convention.

Thank you.
