

STATEMENT BY UNESCO

at the second session of the Meeting of the Parties to
the UNECE/ WHO-EURO Protocol on Water and Health

23-25 November 2010, Bucharest, Romania

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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honour for me to address the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE/WHO-EURO Protocol on Water and Health, on behalf of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Secretary of the International Hydrological Programme of UNESCO.

First and foremost, I would like to express UNESCO's appreciation to the Government of Romania and the Secretariat of the Protocol at UNECE and WHO, for inviting UNESCO to this important meeting.

Water and health issues are closely linked. The quantity and quality of surface waters and groundwater resources available for human use play a central role in sustaining human well-being. Any failure in protecting water resources has an adverse effect on human health and lives of the people who rely on water resources and their quality as their main source of food and livelihoods, such as fisheries, agriculture, and aquaculture, as well as on the sustainability of ecosystems. Furthermore, providing access to safe drinking water and sanitation is an essential pre-requisite for reducing water-borne diseases and associated mortality rates. The Heads of States at the MDG Summit of last September have called for increasing sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation through prioritizing integrated water and sanitation strategies, which include wastewater management and exploring innovative ways of improving water quality monitoring.

UNESCO supports the Protocol's objectives of protecting human health through improved water resources management, the protection of water resources and their ecosystems, and the prevention, control and reduction of water-related disease. We recognize that addressing water and health issues is of vital importance and an urgent priority.

UNESCO's mandate in education, science and culture brings a unique platform to address a number of crucial issues, including that of the Protocol. In the area of water resources management, UNESCO complements the work of other UN agencies and programmes through its water-related programmes, including the International Hydrological Programme, the UNESCO-hosted and -led World Water Assessment Programme and water-related centres, including UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education.

Through our work and expertise on water sciences, UNESCO can play an important role in contributing toward achieving the Protocol's objectives—in particular, by promoting the science, knowledge and capacity building on:

- addressing water and health issues;
- protecting water resources and their quality; and
- providing access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

UNESCO addresses '*water and health*' issues through the work of its International Hydrological Programme, which is an intergovernmental scientific programme dedicated to promoting the science, knowledge and capacity building for sustainable water resources management. It has a wide-ranging programmes related to hydrological, environmental, climate change, social and cultural aspects of water resources management.

Water and health issues are addressed in the current 7th phase of UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme under the theme on "Water and Life Support Systems", which has placed a renewed emphasis on protecting water quality for poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods. UNESCO is also strongly committed to contributing to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, including the Goal for providing access to safe drinking water and sanitation, which is also the main aim of this Protocol.

Hence, we see UNESCO's participation in this meeting as an important entry point to develop cooperation with UNECE and WHO in the area of water and health, both in the framework of the Protocol on Water and Health in the pan-European region, and within other broader global efforts on the issue.

In December 2009, UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme, through its German and Netherlands National Committees, organized jointly with UNECE and WHO an International Workshop on Water and Health.

UNESCO is strongly interested in strengthening these initial cooperation efforts in the future and exploring cooperation opportunities under the implementation of the Protocol. We see ample room for cooperation and complementarity among our activities and the activities of the (draft) Programme of Work for 2011-2013 of the Protocol on Water and Health.

It is very encouraging that the activities of the Protocol's Programme of Work for 2011-2013 on the prevention and control of water pollution, new water resources, water supply and sanitation closely fit with ongoing and planned activities on relevant topics under the Strategic Plan of the 7th phase of UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme (2008-2013).

The prevention and control of water pollution is particularly relevant to our work on water quality, which is addressed in which main objectives are:

- Strengthening the knowledge base on protecting surface and groundwater resources from pollution by traditional and emerging pollutants from all sources through a better understanding and scientific evidence of the distribution of pollutants in the water cycle and their impact on human health and ecosystems;
- Promoting sustainable and innovative approaches to protecting the quality of water resources and preventing and controlling pollution through effective wastewater management in order to secure safe drinking water, food security and livelihoods, and to maintain the ecosystems sustainability and environmental flows
- Building capacity on the importance of good water quality to human and ecosystem health and on protecting the quality of current and future water supplies for all their uses.

There are complementarities among the protocol's activities on new water resources and our activities on wastewater reuse. We have conducted a case-study on wastewater reuse and its potential health impacts in relation to emerging pollutants.

Likewise, water supply and sanitation is pertinent to our activities within the framework of "achieving sustainable urban water management" and "sustainable rural water management", aimed at promoting sustainable and innovative solutions for providing access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

As areas for possible joint activities, where UNESCO can bring its strong comparative advantage in strengthening scientific understanding and building capacities, we identify the activities of the Programme of Work on:

- promoting the prevention and reduction of pollutants and their health impacts from chemicals thematic and training workshops on the related topics. Emerging pollutants and chemicals on water resources is one of the key areas of UNESCO-IHP's work on water quality.
- developing policy and guidance documents on small-scale water supply and sanitation, and the impact of climate change on water supply and sanitation.
- supporting the safe use of wastewater for human and agricultural uses through thematic workshops and policy guidance.

To conclude, I wish to refer to UNESCO's interest in unting our efforts to help countries address their water and health challenges and exploring the possibilities of developing cooperation under the Protocol.

Thank you for your attention.