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Statement

on behalf of

Mr. Sven ALKALAJ

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

delivered by

**Mr. Marco Keiner, Director of Environment Division,
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

at

**the high-level segment of the third session of
the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health**

Høyres Hus, Oslo

Monday, 25 November, 2:30–5:30 p.m.

Distinguished Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to Norway not only for hosting this Meeting, but also for its political leadership and active engagement in the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. I wish in particular to acknowledge the key role played by Kjetil Tveitan, of the Ministry of Health and Care Services, as Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol since 2010.

I would also like to thank our counterparts in the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, with whom the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe — UNECE — jointly services the Protocol. It was my pleasure in June of this year to sign a Memorandum of Understanding between our two organizations on our work-sharing arrangements under the Protocol. That Memorandum is underpinned by excellent cooperation at the working level.

The Protocol on Water and Health is a unique instrument. It is the first international agreement adopted specifically to ensure an adequate supply of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation for everyone.

And the Protocol has proven effective. It has contributed to progress on the water and sanitation-related Millennium Development Goals in the region and to an overall increase in access to both safe water and sanitation. However, and in spite of tremendous efforts undertaken, the situation in the pan-European region still needs our utmost attention. In our region, 19 million people still do not have access to safe drinking water and 67 million do not have adequate sanitation. And, while

statistics show overall progress in increasing access, they also mask significant disparities within and between countries, between urban and rural areas, and between high- and low-income groups.

For example, in the Caucasus and Central Asia, while only 4 per cent of those living in cities do not have access to safe drinking-water sources, 22 per cent of those in rural areas must do without. More dramatically, 71 per cent of the rural population lacks access to piped water in their homes, whereas only 16 per cent of town and city residents are similarly disadvantaged.

The Protocol is based upon a long list of principles — such as the precautionary and polluter-pays principles — but I would like to emphasize in particular the principle of equitable access to water, adequate in terms both of quantity and of quality, that should be provided for all members of the population, especially those who suffer from a disadvantage or social exclusion.

To assist national and local authorities, a self-assessment tool — in the form of a score-card — has been developed under the Protocol to determine the level of equitable access and to highlight vulnerable population groups that might still be left aside. Having been tested in practice, the score-card has now been published in time for your Meeting. I hope that you share my satisfaction with this excellent publication, but, more importantly, that you will ensure that it will be used.

The scorecard is but one of the many successes of the past three years that you will have the chance to review in the coming days, such as an equally impressive Guide to Public Participation. These new policy tools have been complemented by concrete projects taking place at the national level. The work on setting and implementing targets in Armenia,

Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan has been highly effective. I would also like to highlight the accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina and of Serbia to the Protocol and note that many other countries are preparing to join.

In addition, I would like to congratulate the Protocol Parties on the successful completion of the second reporting exercise. It demonstrated progress in compliance with the reporting requirements and indicated an improving trend on water and health issues in the region.

However, the national reports also revealed that Parties are still facing certain challenges in implementation. In this context, I must express my concern that some long-standing Parties have yet to comply with their fundamental obligation to set targets and target dates. I therefore welcome the efforts made by the Compliance Committee to assist Parties in difficulty through its Consultation Process.

Your meeting is, above all, to plan future developments, to keep the momentum and to consolidate the progress achieved. You will therefore adopt a new programme of work. The proposal you have in front of you is both comprehensive and ambitious. I would like to emphasize two important features.

First, it is positive to see that the programme of work reflects your continuing commitment to strengthening the pillars of the Protocol. Second, it should be appreciated that the programme of work is a coherent framework in which the different activities mutually reinforce each other, where action at the national, subregional and regional levels ensures continuous progress, and where capacity development and action on the ground remain the priority.

At the same time, the programme of work needs to be realistic and must be supported by adequate resources to ensure its implementation. To maintain progress in implementation, deliver assistance and provide a platform for exchanging countries' experiences, Parties must make substantial financial contributions to the Protocol's trust funds.

UNECE will do its best to ensure adequate support to the Protocol from its regular budget. However, extrabudgetary resources are also needed if UNECE is to continue both servicing the Protocol's bodies for which it is responsible as well as implementing the activities decided by Parties.

I therefore take this opportunity to thank the many Parties, as well as non-Parties and organizations, that have not only offered financial contributions but also led activities. Looking at the amount of work done, at both the national and international levels, the publications elaborated, the capacity-development activities and the assistance provided directly to countries, I do, sincerely, believe that it was money well spent.

Nevertheless, it is certainly a concern that not all Parties are contributing and that the burden is not fairly shared.

I know that the financial situation across the region is not easy. But I also know that the Protocol addresses vital issues. I am therefore confident that the political commitment will be found to enable you to match the resource needs of the programme of work you will adopt.

In conclusion, I wish to recall that this meeting takes place amidst global debates on the post-2015 development agenda, including on possible water and sanitation-related Sustainable Development Goals. The Protocol provides a practical and tailored approach to water management in support of universal access to safe water and sanitation,

which could support implementation of future targets in these and related fields.

The Protocol is for now a regional instrument, but that might well change and I hope that its success will encourage others to follow and to join it when the time comes.

This year, 2013, is the International Year of Water Cooperation. Though the year is drawing to a close, the need for cooperation at the national and international level continues if we are to achieve access to safe water and sanitation for all. I therefore wish to encourage States to use the Protocol to achieve universal access to safe water and sanitation and the protection and sustainable use of water resources.

Distinguished Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you success in your deliberations.

Thank you.
