

## **FROM HELSINKI TO ROME: MESSAGES TO THE MOP6 FROM THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT**

The Government of Finland hosted on 3 and 4 September 2012 in Helsinki an event to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Water Convention. The meeting gathered Parties, non-Parties - including from outside the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region - and a variety of partners. It debated the achievements of the past 20 years together with the future perspectives for the Convention, against the background of its forthcoming globalization with the upcoming entry into force of an amendment allowing accession by United Nations Members outside UNECE.

The following messages emerged from the meeting which should be of inspiration for future work under the Convention.

- Due to growing water demands and uncertainty from climate change impacts, the Convention is as relevant as ever and its importance will further increase. To achieve water, food and energy security we will need to cooperate across borders as most water resources are transboundary.
- A main challenge for the future will be the involvement of other sectors in the cooperation.
- The main strengths of the work under the Convention have been:
  - The capacity to adapt to changing conditions and to respond to countries demands
  - The continuity of efforts that ensured sustained progress and long-term results
  - The strong drive and ownership by Parties and the close involvement of non-Parties
  - The capacity to build trust
  - The concrete deliverables.All the above is the product of its intergovernmental framework which has kept the Convention responsive and relevant.
- The fact that the Convention has made a concrete difference on the ground in terms of sustainable development and security is due to its important focus on implementation.
- Dispute prevention and dispute solving are central elements of the Water Convention. The establishment of the Implementation Committee is an important step in the Convention's evolution which will make the Convention's framework stronger and better equipped to address future challenges.
- The globalization of the Convention is an important priority for the future which will further strengthen the Convention and shape its face in the next 20 years. It will bring many advantages to current Parties and perspective future Parties outside the UNECE region, in terms of exchange of experience, union of forces, matching of needs and strengthening the political support to transboundary water cooperation.
- The entry into force of the 2003 amendments opening the Convention for accession to UN Member States from outside the ECE region is urgent. Parties who have not done so already should rapidly ratify the amendments to allow opening of the Convention as quickly as possible.
- The relationship with countries outside the UNECE region, as the one with non-Parties in the ECE region, should be inclusive and engaging.
- The similarities and complementarity of the Helsinki Convention and the New York Convention

need to be built upon through exchanges and coordination between the Parties to the two conventions. Any potential conflicts between the two instruments should be avoided, on the contrary it is key to build on synergies, avoid duplications and wastes of resources. The two conventions can provide a legitimate forum to promote transboundary water issues within global policy forums/agenda. Countries should be encouraged to ratify both conventions. To this end, a clear message on the relationship between the two conventions and why countries should accede to both should be developed.

- The experience acquired and the guidance developed under the Water Convention has value well beyond the UNECE region, it is therefore important to ensure a wide dissemination of the guidelines, model provisions and other resources developed under the Water Convention.
- To ensure a proper implementation of the Convention, it is crucial to strengthen the political support to it, increase its visibility, enhance advocacy activities and correct the misinterpretations on its obligations.
- The relationship with partners should be strengthened and formalized in such a way that it ensures clearer and more direct support to the Convention. The Convention can become a federative platform reinforcing the role of all actors that support transboundary water cooperation.
- All Parties need to play their part and actively support the Convention both politically and financially. The Convention needs a stronger basis for financing. It should also be more closely related to development assistance policies of Parties: it has the potential to become not only an objective but also a useful means for development assistance by reinforcing accountability and giving a long-term strategic direction to efforts.
- The last 20 years have been a success but there is still a lot to do, within and outside the UNECE region. The culture of openness, discussion and cooperation of the Convention will provide a strong foundation for tackling tomorrow's challenges.