



**Statement**

by

**Ms. Olga Algayerova**

**United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

**Executive Secretary**

**of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

at

**5<sup>th</sup> session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health  
(Belgrade, Serbia)**

**19 November 2019 (Opening session)**

Prime Minister, Ms. Brnabić,  
WHO Regional Director for Europe ad interim, Ms Östlin,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protocol on Water and Health.

In 1999, 36 UN Member States signed the Protocol, showing their commitment to “promote the protection of human health and well-being within a framework of sustainable development, through improving water management, including the protection of water ecosystems, and through preventing, controlling and reducing water-related disease”. This commitment is still necessary today. Surprisingly, from the initial 36 signatories, 14 have yet to become Parties. I call upon them to complete the process as soon as possible, just as I call upon remaining countries to accede.

The Protocol is unique in the way it brings together two “communities”: water and environment, and health. The approach and principles that were included in the Protocol were pioneering.

Already in 1999, the Protocol mentioned that “Equitable access to water, adequate in terms both of quantity and of quality, should be provided for all members of the population, especially those who suffer a disadvantage or social exclusion”. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all were explicitly recognized as basic human rights in 2010, 10 years after the Protocol came into being.

Concrete actions in various sectors have greatly improved the equity of access to water and sanitation in the pan-European region – many are illustrated in our new publication called “*The human rights to water and sanitation in practice: Findings and lessons learned from the work on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol*”. Today, more children have a decent access to water and sanitation at school. The needs of homeless people are

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better taken in consideration. Solutions are explored to make services affordable to the poorest. I congratulate your efforts, especially on this World Toilet Day, which calls for actions in order to leave no one behind. Let's build on the valuable practical tools and guidance developed under the Protocol to progress even further.

My second example of how this instrument is a pioneer: already in 1999, the Protocol was designed with an eye towards integrated water resources management and intersectoral cooperation, to ensure access to safe drinking water and the provision of sanitation for everyone.

Many values and principles of the Protocol are today found in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Universality, equity, prevention, safety, intersectorality and increased commitment to achieving national targets. The Protocol can therefore be considered as a precursor to the 2030 Agenda, in particular of Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation but also Goal 3 on health and well-being, among others.

A new publication will be launched here, called "*The Protocol on Water and Health and the 2030 Agenda: a practical guide for joint implementation*". It describes how the Protocol's focus on integrated and intersectoral approaches and coherent policies, including the setting and implementing of targets, supports the 2030 Agenda. It highlights the added value of their joint, streamlined planning and implementation.

The national reports demonstrate continuous progress. In a number of countries, drinking water quality has improved. Outbreaks and incidence of water-related infectious diseases have fallen. Access to drinking water and sanitation has increased. The management, protection and use of freshwater resources is more effective, for example with the reduction of water exploitation in recent years in most countries.

However, we should not forget persisting challenges. Gaps remain in ensuring safely managed and climate-resilient water and sanitation services. Equitable access to water and sanitation services is needed for all in all settings. And new health concerns are emerging

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related to the management of water and sanitation systems.

The national reports show that countries are already taking steps to address such challenges. Some have set targets that consider how to incorporate climate change projections in water and sanitation management and how to ensure resilient infrastructure. The Protocol plays a multiplier effect in the region, prompting further progress.

Your commitment and support are key. I warmly thank all countries and organizations that have led activities and contributed financially and in kind to the Protocol's trust funds.

You are going to adopt ambitious future programmes of work. Their successful implementation will only be possible with sufficient financial and in-kind support, and adequate staffing in the joint-secretariat. Unfortunately, in the past, the contributions received were insufficient to implement all activities. This situation needs to change. I therefore call upon all Parties and other stakeholders to contribute to the Protocol trust funds - and to make your pledges at the roundtable on financing this Thursday.

At the same time, for the sustainability of the secretariat, resources from the United Nations regular budget also need to be mobilized. I will personally advocate for this in budget discussions. But I need all of you to make your voices heard in support of this requirement, including towards your ministries of finance and foreign affairs.

To conclude, I wish to thank Serbia: For hosting this meeting and the wonderful hospitality, but also for your exemplary role and remarkable engagement in implementing the Protocol. Being the most recent Party, Serbia has indeed implemented it at full speed, setting targets, and undertaking effective changes to improve access to water and sanitation. I believe this momentum will inspire the debates during this meeting, but also in the next triennium.

I wish all of us a successful meeting. Thank you.

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