



Third meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, Madrid, 26-28 November 2003

**Opening speech by Mr. Pascual FERNÁNDEZ MARTÍNEZ,
Secretary of State of Water and Coastal Areas, Ministry of Environment, Spain**

Mr. Chairman, members of the UNECE Secretariat, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and a privilege to address you on the occasion of the opening of the third Meeting of the Parties of the Helsinki Water Convention. The presence of delegations representing more than 30 UNECE countries as well as participants from a number of international organizations underscores the importance and relevance of the debates that will be held here on the coming days.

The UN's Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, in his report "Implementing Agenda 21" highlighted that water "should be a factor of peaceful dialogue among countries and there is a growing tendency to view shared water resources as a catalyst for cooperation, rather than a cause of tension and conflicts".

A few months later, two of the most relevant decisions included in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) called upon the governments to achieve the Millennium goals on access to safe drinking water and sanitation by the year 2015 and development of integrated water management plans by 2005.

Making this integrated management of water resources in the river basin compulsory constitutes a fundamental reform of the European Union water legislation, as stipulated in the Water Framework Directive. At this point, it should be noted that paragraph 35 of the Preamble, regarding transboundary river basins, states that the Directive "is to contribute to the implementation of Community obligations under international conventions on water protection and management, notably the UNECE Helsinki Convention".

I have read with interest the documents summarizing your achievements since your previous meeting in The Hague as well as the Programme of Work that will be submitted for adoption during the coming days. It is an ambitious and well-structured programme that will certainly contribute to improving the situation in the UNECE region, in keeping with the message of Mr. Kofi Annan.

And with regard to this point, Mr. Chairman, it is appropriate to underscore the need for a concerted effort now and in the immediate future. The activities of the Helsinki Convention and the application of the Water Framework Directive should be directed toward achieving synergies that enhance the efficiency of this concerted action in the field of transboundary cooperation.

There is another element that I would like to highlight. Your work plan contains specific actions relative to the development of the Regional European components of the European Union Water Initiative launched in Johannesburg. As you know, Spain, together with Portugal, are the lead countries for the Latin American component. In addition to water

supply and sanitation and integrated water resources management, we have included two additional topics, namely extreme events management and protection and sustainable water use in agriculture.

The exchange of experiences among the various regional components of the Water Initiative will undoubtedly contribute to reinforcing the synergies to which I made reference before.

Spain's experience in the management and protection of transboundary waters has been consolidated with the entry into force of the bilateral Albufeira Agreement between Spain and Portugal, whose text was inspired by the Helsinki Water Convention, both sharing the basic principle of an equitable distribution of water resources in transboundary river basins. Our experience in this area could be useful when designing and developing transboundary water legislation in those countries that, to date, do not have such agreements in place.

Mr. Chairman,

Please be assured that in the pursuit of your endeavours, you will continue to receive the support of our experts, who have participated over the past 15 years in the UNECE various working groups in the field of water resources protection and management.

Lastly, I wish to refer to an area that I consider to be essential in the field of cooperation. The application of adequate support measures to the Work Programme in each particular case in the UNECE region requires not only theoretical consideration, good will and political commitment. The new action framework derived from the Johannesburg Summit, and consolidated during the meetings in Kyoto, Kiev and the G-8, calls for a concerted cooperative effort and more active participation of the donor countries.

I wish to take this opportunity to inform you that Spain will contribute to the Helsinki Water Convention Trust Fund, subject to the approval of its constitution during this meeting.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

In my remarks, I have tried to convey the support of our Government to your work and to the future activities presented for adoption in this meeting. I wish you every success in your deliberations and a pleasant stay in Madrid.

Thank you.