

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking the Health Ministry of France for organizing today's Workshop on Equitable Access to Water, as well as the other partners involved, the Water Academy, the International Water Office and OECD.

As mentioned by Mr. EYSSARTIER, the main aim of the Protocol on Water and Health is to protect human health and well being by better water management, including the protection of water ecosystems, and by preventing, controlling and reducing water-related diseases. The Protocol is therefore a pioneering multilateral agreement linking social and environmental aspects and addressing development and poverty issues.

The Protocol is closely linked to the MDGs: Goal 4 to reduce child mortality and Goal 7 to ensure environmental sustainability (in particular target 10 - Halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking-water and basic sanitation by 2015 - and target 11 - Achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020). Furthermore the Protocol offers a platform to go beyond target 10, since its final objective is to grant access to drinking water and sanitation to everybody.

Hence the Protocol provides a framework for the realization of the human right to water and is at the forefront of a human rights-based approach to sustainable development.

The human right to water has been progressively recognized both by individual States and by the United Nations as a whole in the past 30 years. Recent developments in the UN Human Rights System – in particular general comment No. 15 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the right to water and the latest decision of the Human Rights Council on international human rights and access to water – have drawn further attention to this topic. But the recognition of the human right to water is only the first step towards its implementation. The Protocol offers a concrete framework to put this right into practice. In fact, even if the “human right to water” never literally appears in the Protocol, many of the related issues are addressed and regulated.

The Protocol aims to provide universal access to water supply and sanitation and that the quality of the water supplied is adequate and does not constitute a potential danger to human health (art.4). This shall include the protection of water resources which are used as sources of drinking water, treatment of water and the establishment, improvement and maintenance of collective systems. To

this aim, the Protocol requires Parties to take positive measures to assist individuals and communities to enjoy access to safe water and adequate sanitation, measures which are tailored to the countries' social, economic and environmental conditions. Parties are also required to monitor, promote and enforce such measures and evaluate progress in implementing the Protocol. Moreover, the Protocol includes far-reaching provisions on public information, public participation and access to justice, public awareness and education. Quite remarkably it also includes provisions on international duty of solidarity requiring Parties to assist each other to achieve the objectives of the Protocol.

One of the bases of the human right to water is to address the needs of vulnerable or marginalized groups and that's our (only) theme for today, we will not consider the other aspects. The Protocol contains provisions on non-discrimination and equity aspects. In particular, article 5 requires 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".

The situation in the UNECE region with regard to equitable access to water is very diverse. In some countries like France, it is a concern for a small but still non-negligible part of the population. In low income countries and countries in transition which are progressively reforming their water sector, including the tariff setting, the need to address social and affordability aspects is an obvious priority.

The aim of this workshop is to share experience on measures implemented in the UNECE region with a view to collecting good practices and lessons-learned. Ensuring an equitable access to water is a shared responsibility of the public and private sectors, financing institutions and international organizations. The good practice document should illustrate the role that each of these actors can play and facilitate the integration and cooperation between them. I am therefore very pleased to have representatives of the different sectors here today and encourage you to actively share your points of view and experience.

Finally allow me to thank M Didier EYSSARTIER for his statement and the excellent arrangements made to host this event. I also would like to congratulate Ms. Elodie Carmona for her efforts to make this meeting a success. I, for one, certainly look forward to further active work with the Government of France in this area.

I would like to conclude by recalling that this workshop is the first activity carried out under the programme of work of the Protocol for 2007-2009, we therefore have a special responsibility these two days to ensure a good start of the work under the Protocol.

Thank you for your attention.