

**Speech of H.E. the Minister of Water Resources of the Republic of
Iraq in the High Level Session of the Meeting of Parties, Helsinki
Convention 1992**

*November 2012
Rome, Italy*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Iraqi Government, I would like to thank the Italian Government and the secretariat of Helsinki Convention for the invitation and the opportunity to take part in the sixth session of the Meeting of Parties on the "protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes". Since its launching twenty years ago, this Convention has proven successful in the promotion of joint cooperation among different countries on water issues. It also significantly enhances the integrated norms and standard for cooperation which makes it as a best practice model at the international level. For these reasons, it is important to have the amendments to this Convention that allow the non-ECE countries to join it.

The success of this convention was an incentive for us to come here and express the State of Iraq will to join it once it is open to the non-ECE countries. We are here also to state our intention to support the programs and initiatives covered by this convention that related to the sustainable water management, preservation of water resources and protection of the environment across the planet.

As you are aware, Iraq is located at the downstream of the two rivers Tigris and Euphrates. More than 65% of its water inflows come from Turkey, Syria and Iran. Since the early beginning of the last century, Iraq was the first country to construct a number of hydrological structures to control flood water that had been frequently threatening Iraq. Water was flowing normally in its rivers before the construction of a number of large storage dams by the source countries. This has led to radical changes in the nature of Iraqi water resources. After completing the construction of the big dams on the upstream of the Euphrates River, the works on the Ilisu Dam at the Tigris River are in progress despite the wide resentment over the construction of this dam. Moreover, during the last few years, a number of rivers coming from the eastern side to Iraq were diverted back to the Iranian territories.

The above measures together with the effects of the climate change have negatively impacted the water condition in Iraq. The decreasing quantities of water and deterioration of its quality have caused significant harm to the agricultural sector and to the Iraqi marshland which is a unique wetland ecosystem. Iraqi marshes have lost a lot of its biodiversity and areas during the last years. Due to the decreasing rainfall, the desertification areas have been increased and the dust storms have become a real problem threatening human health and plants existence in Iraq.

There are ongoing national efforts to improve the management of the available water resources and to also protect their sources however, challenges are still high. Iraq continues its effort to reach bilateral or multilateral agreements with its neighboring countries to ensure its rights in water. This right could be enjoyed through joint co-operating with these countries to adopt the principle of equitable and reasonable utilization of shared water resources, in order to avoid unfair competition and conflict over the decreasing resources.

Considering the success of the water convention implementation over the last 16 years, and the developed institutional framework both could be used to reach bilateral and multilateral agreements with riparian countries and promote further cooperation. In this regard we confirm the adoption and promotion of norms and the standards of the Water Convention.

We believe that the acceleration in opening the Helsinki convention 1992 for the non-ECE countries in particular those which share surface and ground water resources, will lead to enhance the positive cooperation among these countries for improving the sustainable management of the transboundary watercourse. All of these factors will lead to meet the millennium development goals.

Globalizing the UN-ECE Helsinki Convention will effectively develop the needed global legal framework for the international co-operation in transboundary water. The institutional model which has been developed by this convention has proved its effectiveness under various social, economic and environmental circumstances. Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of the International Watercourses - NY1997 could benefit from the accumulated experience and lessons of the Water Convention for its implementation once it is in force.

Finally, I would like to thank you again and to assure that the Republic of Iraq will actively cooperate in implementing this convention globally and regionally.

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