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Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on
the Protection and Use of Transboundary
Watercourses and International Lakes

Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management

Fifteenth meeting

Geneva, 30 September–2 October 2020

Report of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management on its fifteenth meeting

I. Introduction

1. The fifteenth meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) took place in Geneva with remote participation, from 30 September to 2 October 2020, and was followed, in the afternoon of 2 October, by the eleventh meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate. All relevant documentation for the meeting is available on a dedicated page of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Water Convention website.¹

A. Attendance

2. The fifteenth meeting was attended by delegations from the following countries: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Czechia, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mexico, Myanmar, Netherlands, Niger, North Macedonia, Norway, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Sudan, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Zimbabwe.

3. The European Union was also represented.

4. Also attending the meeting were representatives of the following international organizations: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA); the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and UN-Water.

5. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector and academic institutions were present: the African Development Bank (AfDB); Brandenburg University of Technology (Germany); the Centre for Applied Research (Botswana); Chongqing University (China); Commission Internationale de la Meuse; the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention); the Council of Europe Development Bank; Deltares (Netherlands); Earthjustice (United States of America); the German Agency for International Cooperation; Global Environment Facility; Global Water Partnership; Global Water Partnership Central and Eastern Europe; Global Water Partnership Mediterranean; the Indian Environment Law Organization; the International Office for Water/International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO); the International Water Management Institute; the International Water Resources Centre; K. N. Toosi University of Technology (Iran, Islamic Republic of); Northern Arizona University (United States of America); the Mediterranean Network of Basins Organizations; Oxfam; the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel; the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission; Riverine People (Bangladesh); the Scientific Information Centre of the Inter-State Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia; Stockholm International Water Institute; Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar; University of Evora (Portugal); University of Geneva; University of Northumbria (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland); the World Wildlife Fund; and Zoï Environment Network.

¹ See <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/fifteenth-meeting-working-group-integrated-water-resources-management>.

B. Organizational matters

6. The Co-Chairs of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management, Ms. Heide Jekel (Germany) and Ms. Lea Kauppi (Finland), co-chaired the fifteenth meeting.
7. The Working Group adopted the revised annotated agenda (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/1/Rev.1) and the report of the fourteenth meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2019/2).

II. Status of ratification

8. The secretariat informed the participants that, as of September 2020, the Convention had 44 Parties, Ghana being the most recent Party following the deposit of its instrument of accession on 22 June 2020.
9. The representative of Ghana underscored the importance of becoming a Party to the Water Convention and the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses to guide, foster and secure the country's efforts to strengthen transboundary water cooperation with its riparian neighbours. He encouraged other countries to accede to the Water Convention, stating that Ghana was willing to share its experience of accession processes.
10. The representative of Hungary, Vice-Chair of the Bureau of the Convention and co-lead Party for activities to raise awareness and knowledge of and support accession to the Convention (programme area 1, activities 1.1.1 and 1.1.2), congratulated Ghana on its accession and expressed the readiness of the Bureau and Parties to support Ghana in implementing the Water Convention. He encouraged other countries from Africa and beyond to engage in acceding to the Convention.
11. The representative of Kazakhstan, Chair of the Bureau of the Water Convention, also welcomed Ghana to the community of Parties.
12. The representative of UNECA noted with satisfaction that several African countries had become Parties to the Water Convention and many more were at various stages of accession thereto. He affirmed the readiness of UNECA, together with ECE, to support those African countries in their processes of accession.
13. The representatives of Côte d'Ivoire, Iraq and Togo reported on their significant progress towards accession. In Côte d'Ivoire, accession had been approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2020 and the accession process was expected to be finalized in 2021.
14. The representative of Iraq reported that the draft law on accession to the Convention had already passed the first reading in parliament. It was expected that the accession process would be finalized soon. He recalled the request made to the secretariat for technical and legal support to improve the management of transboundary water resources.
15. The representative of Togo reported that accession to the Convention had been approved by the Parliamentary Commission of External Relations and Cooperation in September 2020 and would be submitted soon for adoption in plenary. He reiterated the commitment of Togo to becoming a Party to the Convention before the next session of the Meeting of the Parties and encouraged other riparian countries from the Volta River and Mono River basins to accede to the Convention.
16. The Working Group:
 - (a) Welcomed Ghana as the forty-fourth Party to the Water Convention;
 - (b) Encouraged other countries to start or progress in their national processes of accession.

III. Increasing awareness of and accession to the Convention and application of its principles drawing on the benefits of cooperation

A. Increasing capacity for implementation of the Convention and supporting national processes towards accession

17. The secretariat reported on activities carried out, together with Parties and partners, to build capacity and raise awareness of the Convention, such as:

- The Pan-Africa training session on “International water law and water governance: Improved transboundary water investment in Africa” (Entebbe, Uganda, 11–14 November 2019).
- A training session on international water law for countries’ experts, in support of the negotiation process for the establishment of a river basin organization in the Central Africa region, led by the Economic Community of Central African States (Libreville, 11 February 2020).
- The regional workshop on “Enhancing transboundary water cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa region: progress, challenges and opportunities” (Beirut, 3 and 4 March 2020), which shared achievements of the 2016–2020 project “Making water cooperation happen in the Mediterranean” financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.
- A module on global water conventions delivered during the Oxfam Transboundary Rivers of South Asia course for South Asian young water leaders (7 September 2020).
- The contribution to regional workshops in Central America and the Caribbean on “Monitoring the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 6.5.2” (Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala, 5–7 November 2019) and on “Understanding the challenges: Planning for regional and transboundary action” (Tela, Honduras, 17 and 18 February 2020).

18. The secretariat informed the Working Group about the legal and technical guidance provided to eight countries in the process of accession, including through national workshops on the Convention, such as those organized at the request of countries in Yaoundé (5 and 6 November 2019) and Kampala (15 November 2019), jointly with partners.

19. The secretariat introduced the new publication *Frequently Asked Questions on the 1992 Water Convention with the Road map to facilitate accession processes*,² providing direct and hands-on answers to recurrent questions that arose in the countries interested in accession. The secretariat also presented planned activities to further promote and build capacities on the Convention globally.

20. The representative of Cameroon reported on the outcomes of the national workshop on the Water Convention (Yaoundé, 5 and 6 November 2019), after which a law on accession had been submitted to the Council of Ministers. He requested further support from the secretariat to prepare for the implementation of the Convention.

21. The representative of Uganda reported on the outcomes of the meeting on “Strengthening understanding of the Water Convention in Uganda towards possible accession” (Kampala, 15 November 2019), after which the Ministry of Water and Environment had launched further discussions with relevant ministries and agencies, civil society and academia to progress toward accession.

22. The representative of Burkina Faso reported on a national briefing on the Convention for the National Water Council held on 20 December 2019 and the resulting recommendation to the Ministry of Water and Sanitation to further study the Convention and its benefits and proceed with accession.

² United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.II.E.34.

23. The representative of the Central African Republic reported on the submission of an official letter of interest to the secretariat in March 2020 and the establishment of a national steering committee in July 2020 to coordinate the accession process. He requested further support from the secretariat in that regard.
24. The representative of Nigeria reported on the setting-up of an interministerial committee to discuss the accession process and the submission of an official letter of interest to the secretariat in August 2020.
25. The representative of the United Republic of Tanzania reaffirmed the country's interest in acceding to the two global water conventions and reported on ongoing discussions at the national level.
26. The representative of Paraguay expressed interest in the platform offered by the Water Convention to share experiences on transboundary water management and reported that a national study of the Convention was ongoing.
27. A representative of the European Union congratulated countries for their progress towards accession. He praised the Water Convention's work in supporting countries to accede. He encouraged countries to actively engage with the secretariat to enquire about potential support through an ongoing 2018–2021 European Union-funded project on promoting accession to the Water Convention.
28. A representative of Kazakhstan congratulated countries for their progress towards accession and expressed the willingness of Kazakhstan to share its experiences of cooperation in the implementation of the Water Convention.
29. The Co-Chair recalled the Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2), which she encouraged countries to implement. She added that the Bureau was actively working on the establishment of additional partnerships (such as with the Inter-Parliamentary Union), a priority action identified in the Strategy.
30. The Working Group invited countries and partners to use and promote the new publication *Frequently Asked Questions on the 1992 Water Convention with the Road map to facilitate accession processes* in their own national processes of accession and regional and global activities.

B. Promoting and communicating the benefits of transboundary cooperation, and supporting the development of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies

31. The representative of Hungary, lead Party for the work on supporting the development of agreements and the establishment of joint bodies (programme area 1, activity 1.3), provided an update on activities implemented, in particular the outcomes of the virtual workshop on designing legal frameworks for transboundary water cooperation (Geneva, 28 and 29 July 2020) and the development of a draft annotated outline for the checklist on the development of legal frameworks for transboundary water cooperation (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/INF.2).
32. The secretariat briefed the Working Group on progress in activities on promoting and communicating the benefits of transboundary water cooperation, implemented on the basis of the application of the *Policy Guidance Note on the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation: Identification, Assessment and Communication*.³ The finalization of policy briefs⁴ on that topic in the Cubango-Okavango River basin and the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System basin was highlighted in particular.

³ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/47.

⁴ Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission, "Realizing the Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation in the Cubango-Okavango River basin", policy brief summary (Gaborone, 2019); and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), "The Benefits of Transboundary Water Cooperation in the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System basin", policy brief (2020). Available at www.unecce.org/env/water/benefits_cooperation.html

33. The Working Group:

(a) Called upon countries and organizations to actively contribute to the development of the checklist and to provide written comments on the draft annotated outline to the secretariat no later than 15 October 2020;

(b) Entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the lead Party and a drafting group, to develop the text of the checklist for consideration at the Working Group's next meeting.

C. Implementation Committee

34. The Chair of the Implementation Committee, Mr. Attila Tanzi, informed the Working Group of the advisory procedure initiated by the Committee in response to the request from Montenegro related to its concerns about the possible transboundary impact of the planned construction of additional small hydropower plants on the Cijevna/Cem River in Albania and the subsequent consent of Albania to take part in the procedure. He emphasized that both Montenegro and Albania had demonstrated a cooperative attitude to working with the Committee within the framework of the advisory procedure. He outlined the directions of the Committee's advisory assistance to the two countries (ECE/MP.WAT/IC/2020/2, paras. 5–15) that had been discussed during the eleventh meeting of the Committee (Geneva, 31 August–2 September 2020).

35. The Co-Chair of the Working Group encouraged Parties to make use of the mechanism to support implementation of the Convention by turning to the Implementation Committee should they require advice or assistance regarding bilateral or multilateral cooperation.

IV. Supporting monitoring, assessment and information-sharing in transboundary basins

36. The Co-Chair of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, Mr. Niokhor Ndour (Senegal), reported on the outcomes of the Global workshop on exchange of data and information in transboundary basins (Geneva, 4 and 5 December 2019). He also presented the outcomes of the fifteenth meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 6 December 2019), in particular those emerging from strategic discussions about future work on monitoring and assessment conducted by region (Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia; Africa; Middle East and North Africa, Europe, Americas and Asia). He recalled the topics and activities proposed for consideration for the programme of work of the Water Convention for 2022–2024, according to decisions taken by the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (see ECE/MP.WAT/WG.2/2019/2, paras. 25 (c) and 38–48).

37. He also reported on the establishment of a regional working group on the Senegalese-Mauritanian Aquifer basin, supported by ECE and the Geneva Water Hub, to guide a process involving: (a) the design of a joint project including knowledge and monitoring components, in order to initiate the concerted management of the aquifer; and (b) the development of an action plan. He thanked the European Union for its financial support to the process.

38. The Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management:

(a) Recognizing that the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment had welcomed the reissuing of the publication *Strategies for Monitoring and Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters*⁵ as a version for global use, with necessary updates, invited participants to provide updates or comments to that publication by 30 January 2021;

(b) Invited participants, partners and experts to submit to the secretariat possible written inputs, including comments about needs for updating and topics to add or strengthen

⁵ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.II.E.15.

in the Water Convention guidance documents on monitoring and assessment by 30 January 2021, namely:

- *Guidelines for the Monitoring and Assessment of Transboundary and International Lakes. Part A: Strategy document*⁶
- *Guidelines for the Monitoring and Assessment of Transboundary and International Lakes. Part B: Technical guidelines*⁷
- *Guidelines on Monitoring and Assessment of Transboundary Rivers*⁸
- *Guidelines on Monitoring and Assessment of Transboundary Groundwaters*⁹

V. Promoting an integrated and intersectoral approach to water management at all levels

A. Supporting National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management under the European Union Water Initiative

39. The secretariat, on behalf of the European Union Water Initiative Plus (EUWI+) programme partners (ECE, OECD, Environment Agency Austria and the International Office for Water of France), briefed the Working Group on Water Resources Management on recent developments under the European Union Water Initiative National Policy Dialogues¹⁰ on Integrated Water Resources Management and on Water Supply and Sanitation (facilitated by ECE and OECD) and in particular on the EUWI+ programme¹¹ in the Eastern Neighbourhood region and under the European Union-Central Asia Water, Environment and Climate Change Cooperation project.¹²

40. Partners highlighted the results of the Initiative achieved in 2020 in the areas of legislative and institutional reforms, river basin management planning, monitoring, public participation and awareness-raising, despite the current health crisis challenges and associated delays, and outlined planned activities for the project's final stage. It was noted that current funding for the National Policy Dialogue process in the Eastern Partnership countries would end in spring 2021. Partners informed the Working Group that, in the light of the proposed post-2020 agenda for the Eastern Partnership, they had started to work on defining possible priority activities for the water sector, taking into account post-coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic recovery opportunities and partner countries' needs.

41. Representatives of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine¹³ expressed appreciation for the continued support provided through the European Union Water Initiative and outlined recent and future activities supported through the overall framework of the National Policy Dialogues. They shared concrete results in the areas of strategic planning of water resources management, legal and regulatory reforms, river basin management planning, monitoring, transboundary water cooperation and the revision of

⁶ ECE (Helsinki, 2002). Available at <https://unece.org/DAM/env/water/publications/assessment/lakesstrategydoc.pdf>.

⁷ ECE (Helsinki, Finnish Environment Institute, 2003). Available at <https://unece.org/DAM/env/water/publications/assessment/lakestechnicaldoc.pdf>.

⁸ ECE (Lelystad, Institute for Inland Water Management and Wastewater Treatment (Netherlands), 2000). Available at https://unece.org/DAM/env/water/publications/assessment/guidelines_rivers_2000_english.pdf.

⁹ ECE (Lelystad, Institute for Inland Water Management and Wastewater Treatment (Netherlands), 2000). Available at <https://unece.org/DAM/env/water/publications/assessment/guidelinesgroundwater.pdf>.

¹⁰ Detailed information on National Policy Dialogues is available at www.unece.org/env/water/npd/countrydialogues.html.

¹¹ Detailed information about the programme is available at <https://euwipluseast.eu/index.php/en/>.

¹² Detailed information about the project is available at <https://wecoop.eu/>.

¹³ Written statement only for Ukraine.

targets in the context of the Protocol on Water and Health. They highlighted the need for continuation of that work and the importance of future support.

42. A representative of the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission, speaking on behalf of the European Union, expressed appreciation for the good progress achieved by the Initiative's partners and beneficiary countries, especially in aligning water policy and practices with the general principles and specific requirements of the European Union Water Framework Directive.¹⁴ He highlighted the excellent additional leverage provided by the Water Convention for promoting modern water policy and practices, as well as transboundary cooperation. He informed the Working Group about the EUWI+ final regional event planned for 2021 and expressed the readiness of the European Union to continue supporting the work in the future.

43. The Working Group welcomed the progress in the National Policy Dialogues in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, expressed appreciation for the support provided by the European Union, and encouraged the European Union and other donors to continue supporting financially the work of the National Policy Dialogues in those regions.

B. Water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins

44. The Chair of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus, Mr. Seppo Rekolainen (Finland), presented the progress in activities, notably the:

- Application of the Methodology for assessing the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins;¹⁵
- Development of a synthesis document on nexus solutions and investments in transboundary basins (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/INF.4–TFWFEEN/2020/3), undertaken in cooperation with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN);
- Joint work with the ECE Sustainable Energy Division on the nexus and renewable energy.

45. The secretariat reported on the finalization of the nexus assessment of the North-Western Saharan Aquifer System and completion of the related report¹⁶ and policy brief.¹⁷

46. A representative of Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean underlined the relevance and usefulness of the nexus approach in the Mediterranean region and recalled with appreciation the cooperation on nexus activities with the Water Convention in the Drin River and Drina River basins and the North-Western Saharan Aquifer System. He voiced a commitment to explore further contributions to the nexus work, including through supporting the stocktaking of nexus solutions in South-Eastern Europe.

47. A representative of the ECE Sustainable Energy Division commended the cooperation with the ECE Environment Division and the publication *Towards sustainable renewable energy investment and deployment: Trade-offs and opportunities with water resources and the environment*¹⁸ as an informative tool for policymakers to identify, assess and act upon trade-offs and synergies involved in deploying renewable energy. With the publication at the dissemination stage, the Sustainable Energy Division was looking at possible use in countries by reaching out through the network of the Committee on Sustainable Energy. An energy-

¹⁴ Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 327 (2000), pp. 1–72.

¹⁵ See *Methodology for assessing the water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus in transboundary basins and experiences from its application: synthesis* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.E.31).

¹⁶ See *Reconciling resource uses: Assessment of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System. Part A - "Nexus Challenges and Solutions"* (United Nations publication, ECE/MP.WAT/NONE/16).

¹⁷ ECE, *Policy Brief: Improving sustainable development in the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System through a transboundary nexus approach* (ECE/MP.WAT/NONE/15).

¹⁸ United Nations publication, sales No. E.20.II.E.17.

water multi-stakeholder dialogue event, focused on renewable energy and the ECE region, would be held on 19 October 2020, as preparation to the forthcoming meeting of the Task Force.

48. A representative of Egypt said that alternative renewable energy sources were a possible means of decreasing pressure on water resources.

49. The Co-Chair of the Working Group encouraged interested countries and organizations to consider applying the Methodology for assessing the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins and to use the toolkit contained in the above-mentioned publication *Towards sustainable renewable energy investment and deployment*.

50. The Working Group:

(a) Encouraged countries participating in nexus projects to make use of the nexus assessment results in developing policies and interventions and to explore the possibility of implementing the solutions identified, in collaboration with other sectors;

(b) Encouraged interested countries and organizations, in particular those that had participated in nexus assessments, to complete the questionnaire on nexus (intersectoral) solutions and investments by 15 October 2020, and to nominate participants for the sixth meeting of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus (Geneva, 22 and 23 October 2020);

(c) Entrusted the lead Party Finland, together with the secretariat, to present the preliminary findings from taking stock of nexus solutions and investments in transboundary basins at the sixth meeting of the Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus for discussion, and to prepare a draft synthesis document for the next joint meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 26–28 April 2021).

C. Supporting equitable and sustainable water allocation in the transboundary context

51. The representative of Hungary, lead Party for activities to support countries in developing and revising agreements and arrangements in transboundary basins (programme area 1, activity 1.3), presented an overview of the status of preparation of the transboundary water allocation handbook (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/INF.5). He recalled the handbook's purpose and outlined the overall draft content. He detailed the role of the Expert Group on the Transboundary Water Allocation Handbook and partners in guiding the handbook's development and presented the outcomes of the second meeting of the Expert Group (Geneva (online), 30 and 31 March 2020). He reported on an upcoming virtual regional workshop on water allocation for Europe and the neighbourhood, on 5 and 6 October 2020, and the overall timeline for the handbook's publication and launch at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (Tallinn, 29 September–1 October 2021), including milestones for review and feedback. The Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management was invited to provide comments and discuss the next steps in the process of the handbook's development.

52. The secretariat stated that a list of case studies had been developed in consultation with the Expert Group and most case studies had already been submitted. However, new case studies might be solicited based on identified information gaps and needs.

53. A representative of the International Water Assessment Centre presented updates and preliminary outcomes of the regional process in Central Asia and neighbouring countries on water allocation in a transboundary context, which would also contribute inputs to the handbook. Highlights included a technical meeting of experts (online, 15 May 2020) and a regional meeting on water allocation and environmental flow assessment in a transboundary context (online, 22 and 23 September 2020).

54. The Working Group:

(a) Invited countries and organizations to provide comments to the secretariat on the draft annotated outline of the handbook by 15 October 2020;

(b) Encouraged interested countries and partners to use regional discussions on water allocation to inform the development of the handbook, raise awareness among water practitioners and promote its usage in the lead up to its adoption at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention;

(c) Entrusted the secretariat, drafting team and the Expert Group on the Transboundary Water Allocation Handbook, in cooperation with the lead Party, to finalize the draft handbook for review by the sixteenth meeting of the Working Group, taking into account comments received;

(d) Welcomed the progress made by the International Water Assessment Centre and its contribution to the global handbook process through the regional Central Asia water allocation projects.

VI. Partnerships, communication and knowledge management

A. Cooperation with UN-Water, global and regional partners and other multilateral environmental agreements

55. The Co-Chair recalled that cooperation with different partners at the global and regional levels was a great strength of the Convention work and an objective of the Strategy for the implementation of the Convention at the global level (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2).

56. Partners shared information about their activities at the global and regional levels related to transboundary water cooperation, including in support of awareness-raising and implementation of the Convention and its principles. A representative of the Global Water Partnership reported on cooperation with the Convention regarding several activities, such as: the Convention's input to a massive online open course on governance for transboundary freshwater security launched at the end of August 2020, prepared in the framework of the Global Environment Facility International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network; the promotion of the Water Convention, in particular in Africa and Latin America; nexus assessments in transboundary basins; support to reporting on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals; and support to global workshops under the Convention.

57. A representative of ESCWA highlighted the Commission's role in assisting countries of the region in improving transboundary water cooperation, including through cooperating with the Convention. That included the organization of two joint regional workshops, on enhancing transboundary water cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa region (Beirut, 3 and 4 March 2020) and on indicator 6.5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (Beirut, 5 March 2020), as well as the translation into Arabic and the promotion of guidance documents on reporting on indicator 6.5.2¹⁹ and on the nexus²⁰ developed under the Convention. He reported that ESCWA had prepared a unique regional analysis, entitled "Progress on Shared Water Resources Management in the Arab Region: Regional baseline for SDG Indicator 6.5.2"²¹ and planned to prepare a second report based on the outcomes of the second reporting cycle.

58. The representative of AfDB²² described the importance of the Water Convention as a tool contributing to the development of concertation and cooperation between countries

¹⁹ See www.unece.org/water/transboundary_water_cooperation_reporting.html

²⁰ See www.unece.org/environment-policy/publications/methodology-assessing-water-food-energy-ecosystems-nexus.

²¹ Working paper, E/ESCWA/SDPD/2018/WP.1, 27 December 2018. Available at www.unescwa.org/publications/progress-shared-water-resources-management-arab-region-regional-baseline-sdg-indicator.

²² Statement read out by secretariat.

sharing surface waters and groundwater resources, necessary conditions for the harmonious development of water resources development projects and programmes.

59. The representative of France provided an update on preparations for the IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020 (Marseille, France, postponed to 2021), which would focus, among other things, on conserving fresh water to sustain life. She invited IUCN members to vote online between 7 and 21 October 2020 to support the two proposed motions related to transboundary water cooperation, in particular the motion on “Cooperation on transboundary fresh waters to ensure ecosystem conservation, climate resilience and sustainable development”, which had been developed by the World Wildlife Fund and several countries of the Water Convention Bureau as co-sponsor.²³

60. The representative of UN-Water introduced the 2020–2024 timeline for events and publications by the United Nations family towards the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028. That included: the launch of the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework in July 2020; the organization of a high-level event on water and sanitation by the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2021; the establishment of Sustainable Development Goal 6 annual “moments” on the margins of high-level political forum on sustainable development meetings; and the organization of the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development” (New York, 22–24 March 2023). Lastly, he called upon countries and stakeholders to urgently implement actions to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6 by 2030.

61. The Working Group:

(a) Reconfirmed that partnership and cooperation with different global and regional partners remained key to raising awareness and implementation of the Convention and its principles;

(b) Encouraged partners to further identify possible synergies and join efforts with the Water Convention to support a better understanding and implementation of the Convention and its activities worldwide.

B. Contribution to global events, including the ninth World Water Forum

62. The Executive Secretary of the World Water Forum described the preparations for the ninth World Water Forum, to be organized²⁴ in Dakar by the Government of Senegal and the World Water Council, in cooperation with strategic partners including INBO, ECE and UNESCO. The World Water Forum would aim to promote transboundary cooperation and water security for peace and development. He thanked ECE for its outstanding contribution as a strategic partner of the Forum, in particular in the framework of the “Cooperation” pilot group and as coordinator of action group 3B “Implementing transboundary cooperation to foster peace and prevent conflicts”. He invited all countries and partners to join in the preparations of the Forum.

C. Focal points to the Water Convention

63. The Co-Chair recalled decision VIII/2 on the designation and responsibilities of focal points (see ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.2). She provided an update on the status of nomination of focal points, noting that, while most Parties and other countries sharing transboundary waters had officially nominated their focal points for the Convention (98 countries had designated an official focal point to the Water Convention), a significant number of nominations were still missing.

²³ See www.iucncongress2020.org/motion/017.

²⁴ The ninth World Water Forum has now been postponed to 21–26 March 2022.

64. The Working Group:

(a) Requested Parties that had not yet officially nominated a focal point to do so in accordance with decision VIII/2 as soon as possible;

(b) Encouraged non-Parties that had not yet officially nominated a focal point to do so as soon as possible.

VII. Facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation

65. The representatives of the Netherlands and Switzerland, co-lead Parties for activities to support countries in facilitating financing of transboundary water cooperation (programme area 5), presented the main outcomes of activities carried out in 2020, including the:

- Development of a background study on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/INF.7), in preparation for the global workshop on the same topic (Geneva (online), 16 and 17 December 2020).
- Coordination of a module on financing transboundary water security for the Global Environment Facility International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network massive online open course on governance for transboundary freshwater security.
- Organization of an online event during World Water Week “Water and Climate Change: Accelerating Action” (Stockholm (online), 24–27 August 2020) on financing adaptation to climate change in transboundary basins in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), INBO, AfDB, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

66. They also presented planned future activities, namely: the above-mentioned online workshop on financing transboundary water cooperation and basin development, organized in partnership with AfDB, the Asian Development Bank, the European Investment Bank, the Global Environment Facility and its International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network, IDB, the Netherlands (Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management), OECD, Senegal (Ministry of Water and Sanitation), Switzerland (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), the United Nations Capital Development Fund, the World Wildlife Fund and the World Bank; the development of a full publication informed by the above-mentioned background study and the case studies to be discussed at the workshop; and the possible organization of a side event during the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention.

67. A representative of the Global Environment Facility expressed the Facility’s interest in continuing cooperation with the secretariat and other partners on financing transboundary water cooperation, especially in the context of the current pandemic, in which resilience in transboundary basins needed to be further increased.

68. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed progress made in the programme area on facilitating the financing of transboundary water cooperation and basin development;

(b) Requested the secretariat to finalize and publish the background study on financing transboundary water cooperation in 2021, integrating the comments received at the workshop.

VIII. Adapting to climate change in transboundary basins

69. The Co-Chairs of the Task Force on Water and Climate, Ms. Sibylle Vermont (Switzerland) and Mr. Niels Vlaanderen (Netherlands), reported on the Convention’s activities on adaptation to climate change, including:

- Its contribution to global processes, such as under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. That included the involvement of the Convention in the

twenty-fifth Conference of the Parties to UNFCCC (Madrid, 2–13 December 2019) and in the activities of the UNFCCC Adaptation Committee.

- Its contributions to activities on climate change and water under UN-Water, including the celebration of World Water Day (22 March 2020) and to the development of the *United Nations World Water Development Report 2020: Water and Climate Change*.²⁵
- Its contribution to the organization of events at the 2020 World Water Week.
- The finalization of the French- and Russian-language versions of the publication *Words into Action Guidelines: Implementation Guide for addressing water-related disasters and transboundary cooperation*.²⁶

70. The Working Group was informed of recent developments under the Water Action Track of the Year of Action²⁷ launched by the Global Commission on Adaptation in 2019. Lastly, the Co-Chairs invited the Working Group to participate in the eleventh meeting of the Task Force on Water and Climate (Geneva, 2 October 2020).

71. The representative of INBO emphasized the commitment of INBO to climate change adaptation in transboundary basins, which had been reconfirmed by its eleventh World General Assembly (Marrakesh, Morocco, 30 September–3 October 2019). He emphasized the need to set clear priorities in transboundary climate change adaptation and to foresee the necessary corresponding financing. He introduced an initiative entitled “100 Water and Climate Projects for Africa”, providing support to project leaders in developing proposals in accordance with the requirements of the funding institutions, such as the French Development Agency, the World Bank, the French Facility for Global Environment, the Green Climate Fund and the Adaptation Fund. He invited the Working Group to participate in a webinar entitled “Cost of climate change adaptation at basin level vs cost of inaction” on 13 October 2020.

72. The representative of Egypt stressed the importance and complexity of climate change adaptation in transboundary basins and its significance in terms of protecting and managing transboundary waters in a cooperative manner.

73. The Working Group encouraged countries to mainstream transboundary aspects of water management into their national climate-related documents such as, for example, Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans, and to liaise with colleagues responsible for climate change issues and disaster risk reduction.

IX. Reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 and under the Convention

74. Representatives of the ECE secretariat and UNESCO presented the progress²⁸ of the Integrated Monitoring Initiative for Sustainable Development Goal 6²⁹ coordinated by UN-Water, including the 2020 Data Drive, the 2020–2021 workplan, the publication of indicator-specific reports and Sustainable Development Goal 6 data portal updates. Subsequently, they presented an overview of the activities carried out by ECE, UNESCO and partner organizations to support countries in preparing their national reports on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation in 2020. Those activities included five webinars “SDG indicator 6.5.2: supporting countries in preparing national reports for the 2nd reporting exercise” in English (12 May and 4 June 2020), French (20 May 2020), Russian (28 May 2020) and Spanish (27 May 2020) and two regional

²⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN-Water (Paris, UNESCO, 2020).

²⁶ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.E.30.

²⁷ See <https://gca.org/global-commission-on-adaptation/year-of-action>.

²⁸ See www.sdg6data.org/.

²⁹ See www.sdg6monitoring.org/about/integrated-monitoring-initiative.

workshops to support the reporting process, for the Arab region (Beirut, 5 March 2020) and Asia region (Jakarta, 17 September 2020), organized in collaboration with regional partners.

75. A representative of the secretariat updated the participants on the status of the 2020 reporting exercise on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2, indicating that, by 30 September 2020: (i) over 110 of the 153 countries sharing transboundary waters had submitted their national reports on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2; and (ii) 39 out of 42 Parties had reported under the Water Convention. By the end of 2020, the secretariat expected to review and validate the national country reports, in view of the submission of the data to the United Nations Statistical Division in February 2021. In 2021, the secretariat would provide input to global reports on Sustainable Development Goals, including the Report of the Secretary-General: Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and prepare the second progress report on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation, and the second report on the implementation of the Water Convention, to be presented at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention.

76. The representative of Norway shared the country's experience of transboundary cooperation with Sweden and Finland and coordination in report preparation with neighbouring countries, and emphasized the need to include regional and local level representatives in the reporting process to improve understanding of how cooperation agreements were applied in practice.

77. The representative of Uganda provided an overview of the country's reporting process, including the exchange and feedback on the draft report provided by the co-custodian agencies, and highlighted the remaining difficulties with identifying the area of transboundary groundwater bodies. He underscored the important role of the reporting exercise in improving transboundary water cooperation between neighbouring countries.

78. The representative of Cameroon expressed appreciation for the support provided by ECE and UNESCO in preparing the Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 report and emphasized the need for capacity-building support in enhancing the quality of submitted reports, in particular to improve countries' understanding of the data and the methodology to calculate Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2.

79. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the submission of national reports under the Convention and on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 by a vast majority of countries sharing transboundary waters, and invited those countries having received comments made by ECE and UNESCO to address them as soon as possible, and to send final reports to ECE and UNESCO for the timely submission of indicator 6.5.2 data to the United Nations Statistical Division;

(b) Encouraged all countries sharing water resources that had not yet submitted their national reports to do so as soon as possible, to ensure the inclusion of the data in the different reports on the Sustainable Development Goals;

(c) Invited partners, such as regional economic commissions, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and basin organizations, to capitalize on the reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 in order to continue building capacity on indicator 6.5.2 and for possible joint analysis of the reports at the regional level;

(d) Requested the secretariat to prepare, together with UNESCO and in the framework of UN-Water, a report on the results of the second reporting exercise on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2, translate it into Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish and publish and print it in all those languages.

X. Resources for the implementation of the programme of work

80. The Secretary of the Convention presented the status of financial resources for the implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021 (ECE/MP.WAT/54/Add.1) in 2019, including a breakdown of expenditures per programme area, and the evolution of

expenditures and contributions in previous years. She noted positive trends, with an increased number of contributing Parties, more unearmarked contributions and a rise in the number of donors relying on the annual reporting under the Water Convention, such as the report on contributions and expenditures from January until December 2019 (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/5), for the purpose of reporting on the use of their contributions. However, she expressed concern that the Convention was still relying on financial contributions by only a limited number of Parties. Lastly, she thanked all donors and insisted on the importance of announcing contributions in advance for a better planning of activities under the Convention.

81. Representatives of several countries, such as Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Senegal and Switzerland reported on their countries' commitment to contribute financially to the Convention.

82. The Working Group:

(a) Invited Parties, non-Parties and other donors to provide financial resources for the implementation of the programme of work, if possible unearmarked;

(b) Encouraged donors to accept the overall aggregated financial report prepared annually for the Working Group instead of individual reports for each contribution, if possible.

XI. Implementation of other decisions taken by the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties

A. Proposed targets for a more sustainable and predictable funding of the work under the Convention

83. A representative of the Bureau of the Convention recalled that the Meeting of the Parties at its eighth session (Nur-Sultan, 10–12 October 2018) had requested the secretariat, in cooperation with the Bureau, to prepare options for a more sustainable and predictable funding of the work under the Convention for discussion at the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.WAT/54, para. 103 (h)). The Bureau had discussed the various options and found an intermediary solution while not introducing a mandatory contribution scheme. She presented the draft proposal for targets for financial sustainability of the work under the Water Convention (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/INF.8), which aimed to increase the number of Parties financing the Convention, as well as increase predictability and regularity of funding.

84. The Working Group welcomed the draft targets for a more sustainable and predictable funding of the work under the Convention, invited participants to submit comments by 30 November 2020, and entrusted the secretariat, in cooperation with the Bureau, to include the comments received for consideration at its next meeting.

B. Developing a procedure for proposals to host future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties and call for proposals for hosting the tenth session

85. The secretariat introduced the possible procedure for proposing to host future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties, as described in document ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/4, and the elements for a draft decision of the Meeting of the Parties on the issue. The secretariat recalled that the call for proposals to host the tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention in 2024 (ECE/MP.WAT/WG.1/2020/INF.9) had been disseminated to Parties on 11 June 2020 in order to find a host country for the tenth session and, simultaneously, test the possible procedure for proposing to host future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties. During the discussion, the representatives of Germany and Finland, which had hosted a session of the Meeting of the Parties in the past, emphasized the benefits

associated with hosting the event and chairing the Convention for the subsequent intersessional period.

86. The Working Group:

(a) Invited participants to provide comments to the procedure for proposing to host future sessions of the Meeting of the Parties (to the secretariat by 30 November 2020;

(b) Invited interested Parties to submit proposals to host the tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties by 30 April 2021;

(c) Requested the secretariat to submit, no later than six weeks before the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties, an overview of the proposals received, for consideration and decision by the Meeting of the Parties.

XII. Preparations for the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties

87. The representative of Estonia informed the Working Group about the preparations for the ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties. He mentioned that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there might be a need for adjustments in planning for and organizing the ninth session. He announced that the Convention's Bureau had agreed on "Water and Peace" as a topic of the high-level segment. He also mentioned the possible organization of a back-to-back event on the source-to-sea approach, should the necessary support be received.

XIII. Ongoing programme of work for 2019–2021 and future programme of work for 2022–2024

88. The Secretary of the Convention presented lessons learned from the implementation of the programme of work for 2019–2021, as well as the process and milestones foreseen for the preparation of the programme of work for 2022–2024. That would include an online survey to consult countries and partners on future priorities and inform the development of the next programme of work.

89. The Working Group:

(a) Invited all Parties and non-Parties, as well as partners, to complete the survey on priorities of work under the Water Convention for 2022–2024, to be shared by November 2020;

(b) Entrusted its Co-Chairs, in cooperation with the Bureau, with preparing a proposal for the future programme of work for consideration at its next meeting, based on the upcoming survey on priorities of work for 2022–2024.

XIV. Date and venue of the next joint meeting of the Working Groups

90. The Working Group decided to hold the next joint meeting of the sixteenth meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management and the sixteenth meeting of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment from 26 to 28 April 2021.

91. The Co-Chairs closed the meeting at noon on Friday, 2 October 2020.
