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Statement

by

Ms. Olga Algayerova

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary

of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

Briefing on the 9th session of the Meeting of Parties to the Water Convention

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to today's briefing on the ninth Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention. From the Palais des Nations, where we are located, we are overlooking Lake Geneva - a very popular spot on these summer days. This scenic lake is, in fact, a transboundary lake, sharing its shores with both Switzerland and France. It is not only a beautiful spot for leisure time but also an important source of fresh water and supplier of drinking water to the people on both sides of the border.

Lake Geneva also shows how effective transboundary cooperation can be. 50 years ago, the water quality in the lake was very bad. Since the 1980s, water quality has significantly improved due to joint lake restoration efforts in Switzerland and France with stringent control measures, including advanced wastewater treatment systems. This was also due to the excellent transboundary cooperation on the lake with the International Lake Geneva basin commission. Now going for a swim is again possible in the lake as well as using lake water for drinking.

Lake Geneva is just one example of the many transboundary basins globally. Across the world, three-quarters of UN Member States share rivers or lakes with their neighbours. These transboundary basins cover more than half of the Earth's land surface. They account for an estimated 60% of global freshwater flow and are home to more than 40% of the world's population. Transboundary waters have the potential to unite populations across borders, drive economic prosperity and sustainable development. This is recognized in the 2030 Agenda and in particular its target 6.5.

The work under the Water Convention, serviced by UNECE, has proven its key contribution to advancing transboundary water cooperation, fostering regional integration and preventing conflicts. Over the past three decades, the Convention has had a real impact on the ground: in developed countries and in countries in transition; in water rich and water scarce countries; in politically stable and conflict-prone countries. This instrument, which has been negotiated as a framework to concretely support a better management of transboundary waters, triggers joint action worldwide, with concrete benefits for its Parties and

other countries.

What started as a regional instrument for the pan-European region has now become a truly global instrument. In fact, today we can celebrate an important milestone in the Convention's globalization. Guinea-Bissau has just become the 45th Party to the Convention. As the head of UNECE, I couldn't be more proud of the Water Convention being recognized as a global instrument.

If I had to summarize the essence of the Water Convention in one word, it would be: cooperation. The upcoming 9th Meeting of the Parties offers a cooperative political forum to review progress and address challenges in transboundary cooperation. Conveyed every three years, the Meeting of the Parties is the highest decision-making body of the Water Convention. This is the platform where Parties agree on the tools to strengthen cooperation through several decisions, in particular by adopting the Convention's programme of work for the next three years.

In line with the cooperative spirit of the Convention, the Meeting of the Parties offers a platform open to all those working on issues related to transboundary water cooperation to hear the views of all countries, both Parties and non-Parties, as well as partners and stakeholders.

The Convention plays a key role to prevent conflicts and foster peace, stability, and sustainable development worldwide. The Sustainable Development Goals, with a dedicated indicator, provide us with a clear compass. The Water Convention paves the way to a future where water does not separate populations; but unifies them.

And as there can be no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without sustainable development, the high-level segment of the Meeting will focus on "Water and Peace", a subject central to our preoccupation. I hope that many countries will take part at high level in this meeting since it is a crucial step on the way to the 2023 United Nations water conference.

Before concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Government of Estonia for co-organizing this year's Meeting of the Parties. The initial plan to organize the Meeting of the Parties in Tallinn had to be adjusted – like many other plans over the past year.

Distinguished Ambassador Saarsalu-Layachi, dear Mr. Liiv, thank you for joining us today and we feel very privileged to organize the upcoming Meeting of the Parties, hand-in-hand with you.

Let me also thank the Kazakh Government for having hosted the memorable 8th Meeting of the Parties in Nur-Sultan and even more importantly, for the three-year chairmanship of the Convention following the meeting with many achievements.

I would like to end with inviting all of you, distinguished representatives and partners, to participate in the ninth Meeting of the Parties at the end of September. I look forward to welcoming you either virtually or in-person, here at the Palais des Nations at the banks of Lake Geneva.

Thank you for your attention!
