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Opening statement

by

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at

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

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this ninth Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention, the first hybrid session.

When we started to prepare this meeting, we imagined it to be entirely different. But since the last Meeting of the Parties in Nur-Sultan, the world has changed dramatically. We witnessed a global pandemic. What was envisaged as a large in-person meeting in Estonia's capital Tallinn, had to be adapted to the new realities.

When borders were closed last year, rivers continued to flow, and transboundary waters remained a connector. Despite the pandemic, most of the Water Convention's work programme has been implemented. Two weeks after the lockdown, the Convention organized the first virtual expert meeting, followed by a webinar on transboundary cooperation and Covid-19, and then a virtual workshop on developing agreements with more than 200 participants. Also basin organizations continued their work despite the pandemic. For example, the Drin basin strategic action programme was signed by the Ministers from the riparian countries just a month after the lockdown. The Senegal and Gambia Basin Development Organizations supported the national responses to COVID-19.

This is exactly why more than 100 countries are here today: transboundary water cooperation is so vital for peace, sustainable development and human

well-being that we could not postpone this Meeting of the Parties.

But our shared resources are under threat. Pollution is increasing. More than 80% of plastics in our oceans comes from rivers. In the last months, we have seen devastating flash floods and droughts, forest fires and hurricanes - in Western Europe, East Africa, Central Asia, North America and elsewhere. Growing water scarcity, climate variability and other pressures lead to increased competition over shared water resources. If we continue with current practices, the world will face a 40 percent shortfall between expected demand for water and available supply. We need to act now.

It is therefore encouraging that the majority of the Nationally Determined Contributions submitted this year to UNFCCC include water actions, and some also mention transboundary aspects. Like water, climate change knows no borders. Acting together makes adaptation more effective. The Water Convention has helped countries, since 2006, to jointly adapt to climate change.

As the Secretary-General said, transboundary waters are a global public good and require effective governance. The Water Convention provides a unique global legal and intergovernmental framework, which brings together political and technical levels, support action on the ground and monitor progress. It is a catalyzer and amplifier of action.

The Water Convention's global opening makes these benefits available to all and further strengthens the Convention's potential to enhance transboundary water cooperation.

I am therefore very happy to welcome the new Parties to the Water Convention here today. Ghana and Guinea-Bissau have closely followed Chad and Senegal, and I am delighted that Togo submitted yesterday its instruments of accession and will soon be our “youngest” Party. I am also very pleased that many other countries are in the process. I call upon countries from within and outside the UNECE region to accede, and on existing Parties and partners to support perspective Parties in accession and implementation.

The Water Convention and its work could not be more relevant and timelier. Let me use two examples to illustrate this.

First of all, how to allocate water resources in shared basins in the face of increasing droughts and pressures is a pressing issue. Tomorrow, you will adopt a handbook on water allocation which aims to increase understanding of mechanisms, tools and good practices for water allocation in a transboundary context. It was developed during more than 2 years by over 100 experts from all continents.

Another aspect is financing transboundary cooperation, which remains a major challenge, even more after the recent recession. Therefore, over the past years, the Water Convention has established new partnerships with international financial organizations, offered capacity-building and global advocacy in order to help countries set their finances for transboundary water cooperation on stable footing. Tomorrow you will launch a unique publication on Funding and Financing of Transboundary Water Cooperation and Basin Development,

prepared with these partners. I encourage you to apply and promote these and other tools when you go home.

These examples show that the Water Convention is able to adapt to emerging topics and address sensitive issues. However, also the Convention's structure and procedures needs to be adapted to the new global character of the Convention.

Decisions you will be taking in the next days will guide the Water Convention into the future, such as the targets for financial sustainability. The programme of work for 2022–2024 will clearly define the milestones for the coming years. I congratulate you for including new emerging topics such as the source-to sea approach.

Your presence demonstrates the importance and usefulness of the global Water Convention. But the success of the Water Convention would not have been possible without the support of Parties, other countries and partners - thank you very much!

In particular, I deeply thank the Government of Estonia for co-organizing this Meeting of the Parties. We look forward to the upcoming three years of Estonian chairmanship and specifically to celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Convention together next year in Tallinn.

Finally, my sincere thanks go to the Kazakh Government for the past three-year chairmanship of the Convention with many achievements.

Let me conclude with a famous African proverb: If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

Thank you.
