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Statement

by

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at

“Water and Displacement” event

organized by the World Meteorological Organization, in conjunction with the Permanent Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations Office in Geneva and the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Slovenia with the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva

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Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The speakers before me have eloquently elaborated on the important linkages between water, climate, migration and displacement so I will not repeat what was said but would like to focus on two dimensions: the specific challenges - but also opportunities - linked to the transboundary nature of water resources and the challenges of providing access to water and sanitation to quickly growing displaced and refugee population.

I will also share information on UNECE tools and instruments which can be part of the solution to address these critical challenges.

Since water, climate change and disasters do not respect borders, transboundary basins face challenges in achieving sustainable and peaceful management and are often most vulnerable to climate change. This can compromise the livelihoods of their populations. It is alarming considering that more than 40% of the world population lives in transboundary basins. And even more alarming when realizing that transboundary waters are often the main source of water for populations in conflict or instable areas such as the Middle East or the Sahel, where instability, water scarcity and high levels of displacement create an explosive mix.

This calls for a strong cooperation in shared basins. Cooperation is a prerequisite to deal in a sustainable and peaceful manner with the impacts of water scarcity and climate change. It is also beneficial as it contributes to regional integration, peace and stability.

Transboundary institutions are also key. And it is very promising to witness that

basin organizations are increasingly becoming “agents for peace and change”. The Lake Chad Commission deals with complex challenges that encompass not only water and environmental issues but also security and development dimensions. The Senegal basin development organization was set up to address tensions triggered by periods of drought. Since, it supported regional integration, including on energy.

However, the current level of cooperation is inadequate to deal with existing and predicted challenges. **We need more transboundary cooperation and more and stronger basin organizations around the world. So far only 24 countries worldwide meet the SDG target on transboundary water cooperation.**

The Water Convention, serviced by UNECE, provides a powerful legal framework and an intergovernmental platform to advance transboundary water cooperation and climate action. The Convention has supported the development of agreements and the establishment of transboundary institutions. Since 2007, it has promoted the development of transboundary adaptation strategies and the implementation of adaptation measures, through guidance and projects on the ground. The global network of basins working on climate change is a prominent hub for the exchange of experience.

It is of particular relevance for today’s meeting that the first project implemented under the Convention upon request by a new African Party, namely Senegal, aims to the establish a permanent mechanism for cooperation on the transboundary Senegalo-Mauritanian aquifer. In the face of climate change, this aquifer represents a critical reserve of water in the region. **Its use and management will determine the future economic and social**

opportunities of its population.

I invite all UN Member States to accede to the Water Convention and thank Slovenia, the EU and many other partners for their support to the global implementation of the Convention.

Another major challenge is linked to providing access to water and sanitation to displaced populations and refugees and guarantee their human rights to water and sanitation. While in the UNECE region the magnitude of this problem is not comparable to what is experienced in the Middle East, it is a growing challenge. Again, UNECE offers a tool to address this issue.

The **Protocol on Water and Health** provides a framework for the realization of the human rights to water and sanitation. Since 2007, work under the Protocol on **equitable access to water and sanitation** has led to the development of policy guidance and self-assessment tools that help governments and local authorities in understanding and addressing the challenges of ensuring safe water and sanitation for displaced and refugee populations in Europe.

While tools and the legal frameworks are available, **water issues are not prioritized enough, political will remains weak and financial resources scarce**. Today's event, but also the recently adopted *EU Council Conclusions in water in the EU's external action* are important positive steps.

Thank you.
