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NATIONAL WORKSHOP RELATED TO THE PROTECTION AND USE OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATERCOURSES AND INTERNATIONAL LAKES

Remarks by:

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TUESDAY, 15TH FEBRUARY 2022 | PROTEA HOTEL, ENTEBBE

**Honourable Minister, Ministry of Water and Environment
Heads of Government Agencies,
Development Partners present,
Colleagues from the UN system,
Members of the Civil Society,
Members of the Private Sector
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I am pleased to join you today the 15th of February 2022 in support of the government of Uganda's possible accession to the Water Convention. This is a landmark step. I also thank the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Water Convention and the entire United Nations family for leading this effort, recognizing that Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes requires global and coordinated effort.

Let me begin by echoing the call to action by the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations, Ms Amina Mohammed, at the Africa Water and Sanitation Week in November 2021. Three immediate priorities were highlighted to urgently accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 6 – clean water and sanitation for all - to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

As first priority, she said, and I quote: *“we must promote water security for all. This includes transboundary water cooperation which can help build peace and prevent conflicts. To achieve this I encourage all governments to accede, implement and comply with the two UN global water conventions.”* End quote. Uganda’s three major lakes (Victoria, Albert, and Edward) and 98% of Nile water sources are transboundary. Hence, to achieve SDG six by 2030, transboundary water cooperation is not a maybe, but a must, for Uganda and its neighbouring riparian states.

Supporting international frameworks and treaties on transboundary water resources and course will therefore be critical to Uganda’s enjoyment of her water resources and associated biodiversity. The 1992 Water Convention and the 1997 United Nations Convention on the Non-Navigational Use of International Watercourses together provide the global platforms for transboundary cooperation to support Uganda in its shared water management, including enhancing existing, or supporting new, bilateral and basin agreements and institutions.

UNDP’s work on water and ocean governance focuses primarily on the challenges related to SDG 6– and SDG 14 – to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources. Our projects and programmes bring a diverse suite of actors together to jointly protect ecosystems and ensure the sustainable use of water and ocean resources to build equitable, inclusive, and sustainable societies. Supporting transboundary resources management is part of that effort. Associated with this is the protection of underground aquifers that sustain this transboundary water system.

The UNDP Water & Ocean Governance Programme (WOGP) helps countries achieve integrated, climate-resilient, sustainable, and equitable management of water and ocean resources, and universal access to safe water supply and sanitation. Addressing the triple crisis of climate change, waste, and landscape degradation to save surface and ground waters

requires an integrated approach and a good framework for multistakeholder engagement. The diversity of stakeholders in this national workshop demonstrates the realization of this need.

On 22nd March, the world will celebrate the World Water Day under the theme “**groundwater-Making the invisible visible**”. The theme draws attention to the hidden water resource that has always been critically important but not fully recognized in sustainable development policymaking. UNDP-Nile Basin Initiative partnership on enhancing collaborative management of surface and ground water resources in selected transboundary aquifers is inspired by this recognition.

As part of our global initiative to support sustainable management of transboundary waters, UNDP is working with NBI to enhance collaborative management of surface and ground water resources in selected transboundary aquifers. Our work directly supports the objective of the Water Convention whose aim is to strengthen cooperation in the field of transboundary waters and to promote protection and sustainable use of transboundary surface and underground waters. On behalf of the UN family in Uganda, I would like to applaud Uganda’s intention and plans to accede to the Water Convention and reaffirm UNDP commitment to supporting Uganda on this journey.

Our current work on landscape and wetland restoration is a clear testimony of our commitment to support the protection and sustainable management of Uganda’s freshwater ecosystems. Together with Uganda government UNDP is leading an ambitious programme on wetlands restoration in 24 districts across Uganda, recognizing that wetlands are the natural filters and purifiers of ground water system.

We recognize that there is limited knowledge/understanding of underground water systems (aquifers) and policies relating to ground water. Transboundary water resource management requires a multistakeholder approach and harmonization of policies across the Nile Basin member states. That’s why our work with NBI focuses on generating information to improve the understanding of the available groundwater resources and demonstrating ‘collaborative management’ that optimizes the joint use of surface and groundwater.

We also recognize that land use and landcover change including urbanization is exerting pressure on water resources and aquatic ecosystems ranging from poor waste management, pollution, and destruction of important water catchments, impacting both surface and underground water systems. Together with other partners and through the United Nations system, we are committed to support collaborative arrangement that enhances transboundary management of natural resources through enhanced resource governance and harmonized policies and frameworks.

We understand that addressing the Nile Basin transboundary water resources issues is complex and that is why our first step was to focus on studies, governance, pilot schemes, capacity building and awareness creation in selected aquifers. Our ambition is to scale up the scope by developing comprehensive transboundary natural resource governance frameworks and mobilizing other partners to support their implementation.

UNDP applauds the Government of Uganda for her continued effort in supporting both national and transboundary efforts that promote sustainable utilization of water and environment resources.

The government's support to civil society and private sector engagement in natural resources management sectors has the potential to build momentum and galvanize the government achievements in natural resource governance.

As I conclude, I would like to extend my appreciation to the government of Uganda for hosting this conference and the organizers for the great work. Thank you all for your participation. I wish you fruitful deliberations. It is my hope that this workshop re-energizes debate on ways to deliver on the 2030 agenda for the ultimate benefit of the citizens of Uganda.

I welcome the government of Uganda's decision to accede to the Water Convention.