

Opening speech by Ms. Sonja Koepfel

Secretary of the Water Convention at the National Workshop on the Water Convention in Uganda

Entebbe, 15 February 2019

Your Excellency, Mr. Minister,

Mr Permanent Secretary,

Madam Head of Cooperation and Representative of the Head of the
Delegation of the European Union to Uganda

Madam Resident Representative of the United Nations Development
Programme in Uganda

Mr. Acting Executive Secretary of the Lake Victoria Basin Commission

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to be here with you today at this important National Workshop on the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, also known as the 1992 Water Convention.

Water is necessary for our health and survival, for all economic activity, for energy and agriculture and for the integrity of our environment. 60% of all water resources worldwide are shared between two or more countries. In Uganda this percentage is even higher. Transboundary water cooperation is therefore crucial for peace, sustainable development and human well-being.

It was therefore a great step forward that not only an integrated and dedicated goal on water was included in the SDGs but also a requirement for countries to implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation, as appropriate. SDG indicator 6.5.2 measures progress in this regard.

A year ago, Uganda has submitted its second national report on SDG Indicator 6.5.2 to UNECE and UNESCO as custodian agencies which highlighted the

significant efforts of the Ugandan government in the field of cross-border cooperation. Almost 85% of the surface area of the country's transboundary basins are covered by an operational arrangement which is extremely encouraging and should be commended.

Indeed, Uganda is already heavily involved in several transboundary basin bodies, including the Lake Victoria Basin Commission and the Nile Basin Initiative, whose Uganda secretariat has hosted here in Entebbe since 2002. These represent an implementation of the Water Convention and many of its principles already advanced in these basins. Uganda has also hosted an annual Pan-African training on international water law and governance from 2015 to 2019 which the Water Convention has co-organised.

However, other basins, including aquifers, do not yet have basin agreements and bodies and even existing mechanisms still need to be strengthened in order to ensure their full effectiveness. The Water Convention is a concrete and effective global legal and intergovernmental framework and platform aimed to support cooperation and sustainable management of shared waters, including groundwaters. Accession can enable support by the community of Parties, experience-sharing with basins and countries worldwide, facilitate access to financing and raise the country profile at the international level. The creation of new basin agreements such as the Memorandum of Understanding currently being finalised for the Sio-Malaba-Malakisi basin Uganda shares with Kenya, which the Water Convention supported in the early stages of this process together with IGAD and IUCN, is one such practical example.

It is therefore a logical and welcome step that Uganda considers accession to the Water Convention. Since 2018, Uganda has regularly participated in meetings of the Water Convention. Your country has repeatedly expressed its interest in the Convention during these events. In October 2019, through an official letter, Uganda officially expressed its intention to follow the process of accession to the Convention and set up an Inter-Ministerial Committee to study the advisability of such accession. A national preparatory meeting was held in Kampala at the Ministry on 15 November 2019..

Today's workshop represents an important milestone and unique opportunity for thoroughly analysing the obligations of the Convention, the practical tools it offers to support countries' efforts, and the benefits and risks, if any, associated with its accession. It is important that this workshop results in a clear commitment and roadmap for accession.

Uganda is not alone in this journey. In 2018, Chad and Senegal became the first African Parties to the Convention. Since then, Ghana joined in 2020, and Guinea-Bissau and Togo last year. For example, I have just come from Togo where a national workshop on implementation of the Convention was organized last week. Several other African countries are in advanced stages of accession including Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire and The Gambia, and other states are engaged in starting the accession process, including Namibia, Zambia and Tanzania. From other regions, I can inform that Iraq will soon be a party.

In the spirit of cooperation of the Convention, older Parties and international experts are available to share their experiences. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them:

- Mr Harry Liiv, Special Envoy for Transboundary Waters from the Ministry of the Environment in Estonia and Chair of the Bureau of the Water Convention who will be able to share the experiences of his country which has been a Party to the Convention since 1995;
- Mr. Ben Ampomah, Executive Secretary of Ghana's Water Resources Commission who will be joining us virtually to share the motivation, experiences and value add of Ghana's accession to the Convention.

The secretariat team also includes Mr. Remy Kinna, Legal Officer at the secretariat.

In addition, we have invited several regional experts from basin organizations and regional organizations

- Mr. Isaac Nyarwaya, Acting Executive Secretary, Lake Victoria Basin Commission, and Dr. Ali Said Matano, former Executive Secretary, LVBC, who can both speak to the Commission's experiences in transboundary water cooperation within the framework of the East Africa Community;
- Mr. Fred Mwango, Regional Water Expert with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development who can share the rich cooperation experiences from this region and IGAD's supporting role; and,
- Mr. Tom Waako, Program Officer from the Nile Basin Initiative Secretariat.

I would also like to thank the European Union, who financially supports the organization of this workshop.

Finally, I would like to conclude by thanking His Excellency the Minister of Water and Environment of Uganda for your presence and political support, and the colleagues in the Ministry of Water and Environment, particularly Dr Callist Tindimugaya and Mr Sowed Sewagudde, who have invested heavily in the organization of this event. I would also like to thank Convention partners such as NBI, GIZ, GWP, IUCN, Makerere University and UNDP, which helped us with logistics.

I wish us all an excellent workshop and fruitful discussions.