

**Pan-European Regional Preparatory Meeting for the UN 2023 Water Conference
Geneva/hybrid, 12–13 April 2022**

Session 5 – Improve knowledge, management and protection of groundwater

Thank you, Chair.

Given the crosscutting nature and impact of groundwater, the research and protective management of groundwater requires multi-disciplinary science and cross-sectoral policy development. Integrated management of surface and groundwater and groundwater-dependent ecosystems is needed, taking into account the context of societal and environmental, social and economic issues, as well as engaging stakeholders within an open and participatory process.

In recent years, the nexus approach has become a well established methodological approach for addressing the increasingly challenging competition between different users of groundwater as it enables reconciling the interest of different systems. Intrinsically, the method can be upgraded and applied to many situations.

Despite great scientific advancements in mapping and monitoring groundwater, the complexity of the topic makes it difficult for scientists and practitioners to present the findings, challenges and possible solutions to the policy- and decision-makers, as well as to the broader public. In many countries, there is a lack of groundwater professionals. Governments must prioritise the formation of human and institutional capacity, and the skills of communicating groundwater science.

Globally, out of the most stressed aquifers, the majority are transboundary. Only a handful benefit from legal cooperative frameworks. The UN Watercourse Convention, the Helsinki Water Convention and the Draft Articles on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers provide sufficient legal base to build bilateral and regional agreements on transboundary aquifers, thus diminishing the potential for future conflicts.

Furthermore, climate change action and conjunctive water management offer opportunities for multidisciplinary cross-sectoral and transboundary cooperation. International cooperation, data exchange and knowledge sharing are crucial for tackling serious pollution and depletion problems worldwide.

Last but not least, the SDG 6 Accelerator and other UN instruments offer the tools for progressive impact in all five acceleration areas also for groundwater. Let us use them and let us be innovative. Groundwater is our last resort and the source of our deep resilience.

Thank you.

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**Session 6 – Accelerating progress through partnerships, financing, data,
research and innovation**

Thank you, Chair.

Water is an essential enabler of the entire Agenda 2030. Lack of progress on SDG 6 puts the achievement of the all SDGs at risk. There is a clear need for progressive development and a more ambitious transformational approach to water-related challenges.

The SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework provides us with the tool to do it. Progress in all five acceleration areas - governance, finance, innovation, data and capacity building - is inter-dependent. We need innovation in governance and finance. We need data and capacity for well-informed governance. We need good governance to attract finance, while finance is useless unless we have the capacity to implement the projects.

Water is a crosscutting issue and most water-related decisions are taken outside the water sector. We need to turn the tide on cross-sectoral cooperation of water-related goals and targets of the Agenda 2030. We need to consider interdependencies and co-benefits with other sectors in planning, policy-making and action in all five areas of acceleration.

The Bonn Key Messages and the EU Council Conclusions on Water in EU's External Action promote a comprehensive approach to water and water's crosscutting nature. They promote cross-sectoral partnership and action along the areas of SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework through a human rights-based and gender responsive approach.

Both also point to the value of partnerships between countries sharing a basin. Transboundary water cooperation is a well-proven instrument of sustainable development, conflict prevention and peace.

For a truly integrated global response, we need a less fragmented global water governance. The Bonn Key Messages and the EU Council Conclusions call for a greater coherence of UN efforts on water and for the appointment of a UN Special Envoy for Water to strengthen the international water voice and cross-sectoral connections, to mobilize finance and stimulate global action.

The UN 2023 water conference must be action-oriented, with clear deliverable and a follow up. Ideally, based on the outcomes of the conference, the UN Special Envoy on Water would be tasked to prepare - with the assistance of UN WATER - a Plan of Action on achieving water-related targets after 2028 and beyond 2030.

Thank you.