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Statement

by

Ms. Olga Algayerova

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

the session on

“Transboundary water cooperation for Economic Growth and Sustainability”

of the Second International High-Level Conference on the

International Action Decade “Water for Sustainable Development” 2018-2028

7 June 2022

16:30-18:00 (Dushanbe time)

Dushanbe, Kokhi Somon, Amphitheater hall, 1st floor

Statement/Intervention limited to 5 min

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Across the world, there are 276 transboundary lake and river basins. These transboundary basins cover more than half of the Earth's land surface, accounting for an estimated 60% of global freshwater flow, and are home to more than 40% of the world's population. In addition, about 600 transboundary aquifers help to serve the 2 billion people who depend on groundwater for their needs.

These shared waters create socio-economic, environmental and political inter-dependencies.

Transboundary water cooperation is therefore not only crucial for realizing SGD 6, but also provides an important catalyst for other SDGs and for the promotion of peace and regional stability, by preventing conflicts over dwindling water resources and maximising social and economic benefits from water use.

However, SDG6 is badly off track, and so is its target 6.5 on implementing integrated water management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation.

In fact, the second monitoring on SDG indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation, carried out by UNECE and UNESCO as co-custodian agencies, revealed that only 24 countries, out of the 153 sharing transboundary waters, have operational arrangements on 100% of their transboundary basin area.

Significant efforts need to be done to ensure that all transboundary basins are covered by operational cooperation by 2030.

We need greater commitment and political support to move forward together in different areas:

First, riparian countries should establish cooperation where it does not yet exist, including on groundwaters. This requires capacity-building and addressing data gaps.

Second, we need to scale-up finance for cooperation and sustainable development of shared basins.

Third, we should fully leverage powerful legal instruments like the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, which UNECE has the honour to service, to advance cooperation, prevent conflicts and build resilience.

Since the Convention's adoption in 1992, more than 90 agreements on shared waters have been put in place in the Pan-European region. These agreements have increased flood protection, facilitated intersectoral cooperation, supported early warning and data exchange and enhanced stakeholder participation in water management. 19 out of the 24 countries with all transboundary waters covered by operational arrangements are indeed Parties to the Convention. These 30 years of successes will be celebrated in Tallin at the end of the month.

But how has the Convention advanced cooperation?

It has provided a sound and flexible legal framework to support the development of basins agreements in very different settings. It has thus promoted long term sustainability and predictability of cooperation based on internationally agreed principles of water law.

It has provided a multilateral framework that supports countries' efforts by building capacity, promoting the exchange of experiences on legal, institutional and technical issues, and providing common policy responses to emerging challenges, like climate change or water allocation.

Finally, it has supported cooperation on the ground, such as in the Chu Talas and Dniester rivers basin or in the Senegalo Mauritanian Aquifer Basin.

In many respects, the Water Convention demonstrates the strength of multilateralism and of the rule of law. 130 countries worldwide take part in its activities and more than 15 countries are on their way to join the currently 46 Parties.

I call all United Nations Member States to accede to it and to take advantage of its tools and of its multilateral framework.

So we have at our disposal tools and good examples to build upon in order to accelerate transboundary water cooperation and we have to make the best use of them. We also cannot miss the opportunity represented by the 2023 UN water conference to make transboundary water cooperation a priority for the water community and beyond. UNECE is committed to join forces with all relevant actors in this direction.

Thank you for your attention.