

**Draft Briefing for H.E. Prof. Muhammadou M.O. Kah, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations and other International Organisations in Geneva**

***Title: Lessons and perspectives on Water Cooperation for Africa and Europe: From the 2022 Dakar Forum to the 2023 UN Water Conference***

***What was the motivation for The Gambia to engage in acceding to the Water Convention?***

- The Gambia is a member of the Gambia River Basin Development Organisation (OMVG) which involves three (3) other member states namely Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Senegal through the 1978 Convention initiated by The Gambia and Senegal. The river basin covers almost 90 percent of The Gambian territory and occupies the downstream most part before it meets the sea at Banjul.
- The Gambia is also part of the Senegalo-Mauritanian Aquifer Basin (SMAB), stretching from Guinea Bissau right to Mauritanian (approx. 1,300 km long). The basin has a total area of 350,000 km<sup>2</sup> of which; 115,000 km<sup>2</sup> is Mauritania, 195,000 km<sup>2</sup> is Senegal, 11,295 km<sup>2</sup> is The Gambia (covers the entire country) and 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> is Guinea Bissau. As of 2020, the aquifer basin supports a population of over 25 million inhabitants in the riparian states. Consequently, The Gambia relies 100 percent on the groundwater resources from this aquifer system, to meet its domestic water supply, especially in the Urban areas.
- The Gambia has a history and tradition of cooperation with its neighbours especially our sister country Senegal, whom we jointly formed the OMVG through our visionary leaders Leopold Sedar Senghor and Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara of Senegal and The Gambia, respectively. In this view, joining the Water Convention for us, is to strengthen that intrinsic nature of cooperation, to seek technical support to manage the complexity of the impact of climate change, population increase, economic prosperity, environmental degradation both at basin and country level. In essence, it is to learn from the experience and success of the Convention, in its three-decade global operation.

***What has been the experience of The Gambia so far?***

- Our experience as a country with the Convention has been a remarkable one. We benefitted from the capacity building through workshops and conferences that were organized by the Convention from 2015 to date
- The Water Convention Secretariat, with other technical partners convened and coordinated a comprehensive dialogue between the riparian states of SMAB, in close collaboration with river basin organisations OMVS and OMVG. The dialogue established firm commitment for transboundary cooperation on the shared water resources, thus, a Common Vision and a Joint Regional Project was ultimately developed. A regional working

group (RWG) has been created and mandated by the Ministerial Declaration of the 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2021, to spearhead transboundary cooperation. This is a great achievement for our region as a whole and our country in particular.

- The Secretariat organised through the financial support from EU the National Awareness Creation and briefing on the countries accession process to the two (2) UN Water Conventions on the 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2021 in Banjul. This has created wide visibility for the work of the convention especially among the key stakeholders. It also built connection between EU Delegation in The Gambia and the Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources.
- The Convention supported the Gambia's participation at the 9<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum in Dakar, where our Vice President highlighted in her speech, the commitment of the Government to acceding to the Convention after the Cabinet approval in January 2022. I therefore, assure you of our unwavering commitment to accede to the two water conventions i.e., convention on the law of the non-navigational uses of international watercourses (New York Convention) and the convention on the protection and use of transboundary watercourses and international lakes (UNECE Water Convention). We are now at the final stages of the accession process i.e., ratification of the convention at the National Assembly, which is expected to happen soon.
- Furthermore, The Gambia took inspiration from the work of the Water Convention and hence seek support for the pending legal and institutional restructuring in the water sector, wherein three (3) draft bills validated since October 2014 are still waiting to be enacted. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, although the bills have suffered some delay, they are recently being reviewed and most updated versions are; a) The Gambia Water Bill, 2020 b) National Water Resources Management Authority (NWRMA) Bill, 2019 and c) The Gambia Meteorological Authority (GAMA) Bill, 2018.

Finally, I wish to thank the Water Convention Secretariat, the EU, our sister Republic of Senegal for the cooperation and support.