

Opening speech by Ms. Sonja Koepfel

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

Windhoek, 31 May 2022

Madam Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform

Mr Head of Cooperation of the Delegation of the European Union to Namibia,

Mr Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in Namibia,

Mr Executive Secretary of the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission – OKACOM,

Mr Executive Secretary of the Orange-Senqu River Commission – ORASECOM,

Mr Executive Secretary of the Zambezi Watercourse Commission - ZAMCOM,

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 life, for all economic activity, for energy and agriculture and for the integrity of our environment. This is even more evident in dry countries such as Namibia 60% of all water resources worldwide are shared between two or more countries. Namibia shares all her perennial rivers with neighboring countries and is both a mid-stream and downstream country. Transboundary water cooperation is therefore crucial for peace, sustainable development and human well-being.

For this reason, it was 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.

As the indicator value for 6.5.2 shows, Namibia is already heavily involved in many transboundary basin organizations, including the Orange-Senqu River Commission, Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission, Zambezi Watercourse Commission and Cuvelai Watercourse Commission. I am happy to inform that the heads of all these basin organizations are joining us today.

At regional level, Namibia is a party to the 2000 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Revised Protocol on Shared Watercourses. And notably at the global level, Namibia is already a party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, commonly referred to as the 1997 Watercourses Convention.

However, many remaining and new challenges persist in transboundary water cooperation, including in Namibia, such as increased water scarcity and droughts due to climate change and development, increasing pollution prevention etc. As an effective global legal and intergovernmental framework and platform for cooperation and sustainable management of shared waters, including groundwaters the Water Convention exactly helps countries to address those challenges. 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. It also strengthens national water management and transboundary cooperation.

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. Several other African countries are in advanced stages of accession including Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire and The Gambia, and other states are starting the accession process, including Uganda, Tanzania and also Zambia which is where we organized a National Workshop last week. From other regions, I can inform that Iraq will soon be a party.

It is therefore a logical and welcome step that Namibia intends to accede to the Water Convention. In fact, you have already taken crucial steps by sending an official letter of interest to the Convention secretariat last October and through

your Ministers statement at the Conventions ninth session of the Meeting of the Parties in September announcing Namibia's intention to accede to the Convention.

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 associated with its accession.

It is important that this workshop results in a clear commitment and roadmap for accession. Such accession can ideally still happen this year, but at the latest before the United Nations water conference (March 2023).

As current chair of AMCOW Namibia has an important role to play in promoting transboundary water cooperation and the Water Convention at the continental level and towards the 2023 UN Water conference. Because transboundary water cooperation and the Water Convention are much more effective if all riparian countries accede to it. I therefore encourage you to promote the Convention also in the basin commissions, bilateral cooperation, to subregional level and within AMCOW.

I would like to thank the European Union, who financially supports the organization of this workshop as well as the Convention and transboundary water cooperation more broadly.

Finally, I would like to thank the colleagues in the Ministry, particularly Ms Maria Amakali, Ms. Ndina Nashipili and Ms. Selma Kalili, who have invested heavily in the organization of this event. I would also like to thank Convention partners such as the EU, GIZ, GWP, OKACOM, ORASECOM, ZAMCOM and UNDP, which helped us with logistics.

- Alone you can go fast. Together we can go far.

I wish us all an excellent workshop and fruitful discussions.